

TALES FROM THE YAWNING PORTAL SPECIAL!

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THE ENDEAVOR ISSUE

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

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DRAGON+

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Welcome to Issue 13

Bart Carroll endeavors to explore the many tales and mysteries to be found in the Yawning Portal

First and foremost, welcome to issue 13 of *Dragon+*! To paraphrase *This American Life*, each issue we choose a theme and bring you different kinds of content on that theme.

For this issue, we settled on the theme of “Endeavors.”

We’re of course covering the release of *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, which recently hit store shelves and gaming tables alike. And so we imagine players and DMs are already in the midst of their own endeavors, looking to complete some or even all of the book’s adventures. We have quite a few tales of our own to tell about the book—and there’s a lot to be said through fiction, maps, concept art, and interviews. Because it’s much more than we could possibly fit into a single article, we’ve thus broken it out with separate pieces focused on each of the book’s seven adventures.

And while we’re all proud of how *Tales from the Yawning Portal* turned out and excited to bring its adventures into fifth edition, there’s even more going on with D&D these days: Localization efforts. Media developer Curse has opened the beta testing for **D&D Beyond**. Experiment 7 has announced **Dungeon Chess** for VR platforms. Neverwinter has released its latest module, The Cloaked Ascendancy, for Xbox; and Beamdog has released **Planescape: Torment: Enhanced Edition** on multiple platforms.

Quite a list, and all just since last issue!

We’ll explore all these endeavors within the pages of this jam-packed issue 13 of *Dragon+*, even as we venture inside the Yawning Portal

tavern and the tales of adventure that have been told there throughout the years. And where better to start than Waterdeep's own investigative broadsheet, *The Whisperer*?

— Bart Carroll

Tavern for the People or Bastion against Unspeakable Evil?

Durnan is one of those people everyone knows. It seems that most cities along the Sword Coast have somehow heard of this laconic bartender and his famous tavern, the Yawning Portal. I daresay that more people know of Durnan than of the Open Lord herself, even though Durnan rarely speaks more than two words at a time.

But what do we really know about Durnan and the Yawning Portal?

Certainly, his fame among Waterdhavians—and all folk of the Sword Coast for that matter—is boosted because of his legendary exploits within the dungeon of Undermountain—and more specifically, the treasure hoard that he and that lascivious scallywag Mirt pulled out of there well over a century ago. To this day, that hoard ranks among one of the most profitable hauls ever removed from the dungeon. Mirt, like any selfish and disappointing adventurer, used the spoils to build himself an opulent mansion, filling it with all manner of earthly (and unearthly) delights. But with his share, Durnan built himself a tavern—the Yawning Portal—which seems like a reasonable thing for an adventurer of means to do. Except that he built it right over the pit leading into Undermountain (which seems a very poor location for a tavern).

Here, dear reader, was a mystery worth looking into. And the more I



have delved into it, the more questions I have.

With his share of the loot, Durnan could have easily retired from any sort of labor. He could have bought himself a nice parcel of land out on Undercliff and lived a farmer's life of solitude and reflection. A life that seems far more in keeping with his nature, I might add. But strangely enough, Durnan used his wealth to put himself in the middle of one of the busiest taverns along the Sword Coast. The more I thought about it, the more I wondered if there wasn't some other reason why this taciturn curmudgeon built this strange tavern around one of the only known entrances to the Undermountain complex. Did Durnan build the Yawning Portal with the primary intention of creating some kind of monitoring station for Undermountain, and only secondarily as a tavern? Was the Portal designed to protect us Waterdhavians from some unknown creatures or magic contained within Undermountain? As a magical ward of some kind? What did Durnan discover while down there? He went missing for decades and was presumed dead at one time.

What is Durnan not telling us?

Suffice it to say that Durnan would not give any answers to my questions, but I have only begun in my quest to unlock the secrets of the Yawning Portal and its mysterious owner. There are many ancient mysteries within the city of Waterdeep, and the purpose of the Yawning Portal and its seemingly immortal proprietor is one of the most compelling puzzles I have yet to piece together.

More to come, dear reader. More to come!

— V.T.

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Imagining the Ampersand

Meet Dani Hartel—the artist who created the amazing Peeps cover of this issue of *Dragon+*

Just how do you take an iconic image from the history of D&D and remake it in the form of a gooey Easter treat? Well, Dani Hartel—an artist, illustrator, and prop maker based in Dayton, Washington—is here to explain how she recreated the classic cover of the first edition *Player's Handbook*—and reinterpreted it through the medium of those oh-so-adorable Peeps.

Please introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your background and your art?

I'm Dani Hartel, and I've primarily been a fantasy illustrator for a few years. I do a lot of art for Fantasy Flight Games on their

Arkham Horror, Call of Cthulhu, Game of Thrones, and Lord of the Rings games. I also do costume and prop work as a hobby, and last year I convinced my friends at D&D to let me build a giant's helmet and axes for their PAX West setup. I think that stuck in their minds when they were looking for someone to put together a Peeps diorama for this cover, and I'm glad it did! It was the most unbelievable and hilarious job offer I've ever gotten.



Dani Hartel



Making art and props for fantasy companies must be an interesting job.

I love making art and costumes and props so much. It's a lot of hard, frustrating work, but I can't believe how lucky I am to have opportunities like this. I get to bring these great works of imagination into reality as best I can, to enhance the experience for the players.

How much history do you have with D&D? How did you first get into the game?

I played my first D&D game when I was about twenty, and honestly

haven't been able to play as much as I'd like to since then. I tend to be quite the hermit. I read the *Monster Manual* quite a bit, and there are numerous streamed games online that I watch pretty frequently while I work. So I get to experience the stories and worlds through them. When I do get to play, my friends and I focus on creating hilarious characters, getting ourselves into absurd situations, and having a lot of laughs.

You also work in painting and illustration—what kind of fantasy subjects and creatures do you like to depict?

My favorite things to paint (digitally or traditionally) are realistic versions of fantasy creatures and characters, but if I can achieve a good blend of cute, funny, and creepy in the same piece, then I'm really having fun.

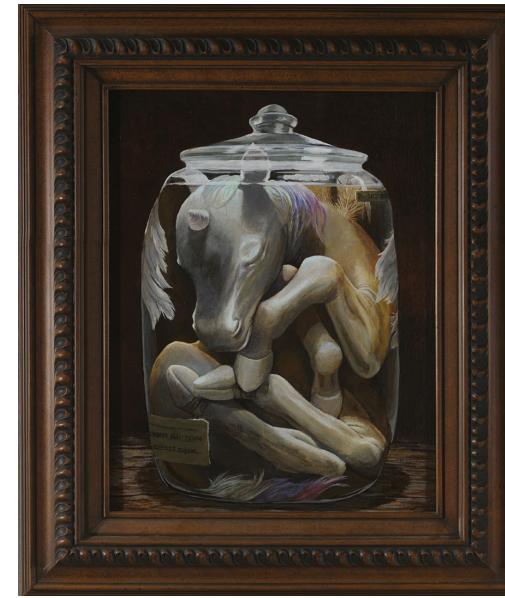
This issue's cover is inspired by Peeps. Tell us a bit more about them for people who might not have encountered those candies before?

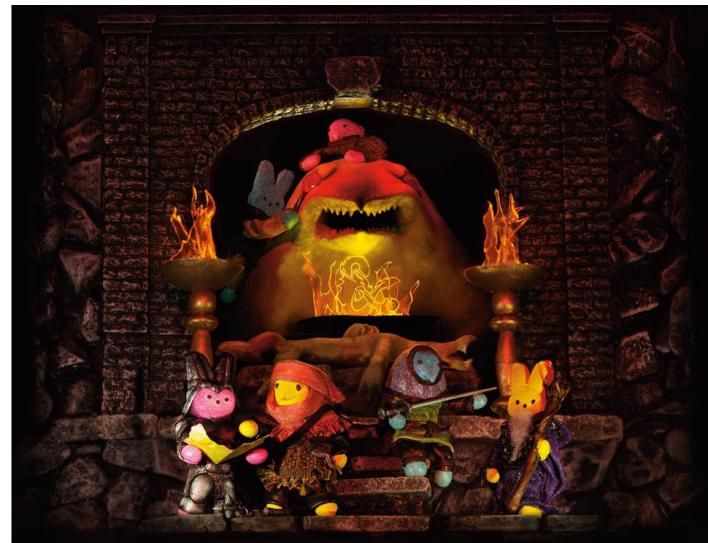
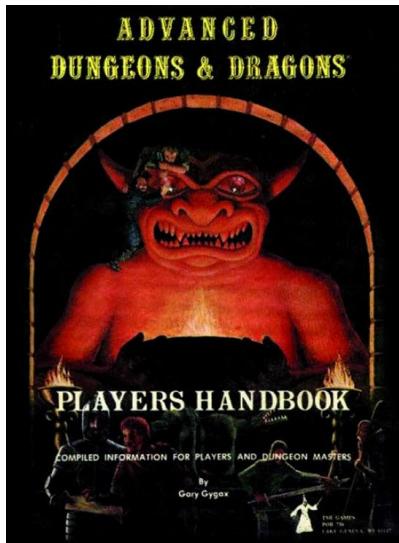
Oh, man. If you've never seen a Peep before, you're in for quite an experience. They vary, depending on how fresh they are or where they were stored, but they can be stiff and foamy or super squishy and sticky. I've seen many a heated debate about the most enjoyable way to eat them.

Honestly, I don't care to eat them at all. They're so weird! I prefer to put them in the microwave and watch them explode.

Talk us through the process of creating the cover of this issue of *Dragon+*?

I haven't built a diorama since the fourth grade, and it was probably terrible. So I started by looking at a lot of pictures of super-realistic models of trains and battlefields, but also a lot of the Peeps dioramas that other people have built. I knew that the level of detail I wanted had to feel gritty enough to be reminiscent of the first edition *Player's Handbook*, but be simplified and cute enough that the Peeps didn't feel out of place.





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I did some sketches to make sure I had a balance of styles that I liked, and I also started gathering fabrics and decor. Using things like rocks and stone to get a very realistic feel to the dungeon was important to me, as I was trying my hardest to make this not look like a kindergarten craft project gone wrong.



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At this time, I was also making molds of the Peeps. I knew trying to glue or sew clothes onto them would be a sticky nightmare, and also that they wouldn't last. By molding them and casting them in a lightweight resin, I could paint and glue and pose them any way I wanted, without worry.



After pulling out the resin casts and cutting off their adorable little heads, I drilled a hole and used epoxy glue to insert a wire that would become the posable body.



Then came clothes and accessories! For their weapons, I used Model Magic modeling compound, which I lovingly call marshmallow clay. It's awesome for sculpting cute little things that don't need a lot of detail, and it air-dries overnight. I used a flat toothpick for the sword and some necklace chain for the mace to make up for the things Model Magic isn't really good at replicating.



For our adventuring party's clothing, I bought white fabric remnants with interesting textures, and dyed little swatches with fabric markers to create my own colors and patterns. There's also some armor made with Worbla shapeable plastic, some painted mesh to imitate chain mail, and faux leather for pants and cloaks.

I knew the lighting on this diorama was going to be the most important thing. The classic *PHB* cover is all about the firelight on that demon statue in the back, with the dark dungeon environment for contrast. I decided to dye clear Worbla that I had cut into flame shapes, and twist them so the light would catch the edges, recreating the organic shapes of fire. Getting the tiny LEDs to point in just the

right direction to light up the shapes correctly was tricky and took a bit of experimentation.



This diorama wouldn't have been complete if I didn't redesign the demon from the original *PHB* cover to fit in a realm of Peeps. So after a few sketches exploring different ways to merge the style of the original demon and the iconic shapes and proportions of a classic chick Peep, I found a happy balance of both that made me laugh way too hard. I constructed him out of Sculpey low-temperature clay and then painted him up and gave him his classic ruby eyes. I started calling him The Demon Peep and making small offerings to him to appease his adorable wrath.

Then, after gluing everything in place and wiring it all up, photos were taken!

Do you think readers could work with these methods to create other D&D creatures or classic scenes?

I know there are already people creating amazing D&D dungeon

models and dioramas, but mixing in other sculpting styles and more of the doll construction techniques could be really interesting. I, myself, intend to build a flail snail doll as soon as I get some free time.

The cover is based on the *Player's Handbook* from 1978. What appealed to you about recreating that cover?

The D&D office asked specifically for the *PHB* image to be recreated, but I couldn't have been happier with their choice. It's one of the most iconic D&D images, and I was incredibly amused at the thought of taking such a dark and gritty image and making it cute with the addition of Peeps.

How did you go about giving each character in the diorama their distinctive look and feel? Who's your favorite and why?

Each little guy in the original image has a different outfit and color theme, and I wanted to stay pretty close to those designs. I wanted to keep things as similar as possible, while embellishing on the design a little bit. The wizard's robes and knight's armor were a lot of fun to construct, but I think my favorite has to be the Peep with the head wrap, tunic, and dagger. I disliked how plain the original red outfit was, and decided he needed a little more drama and style.



What was the most challenging part of re-creating the cover, and what was the most enjoyable?

The trickiest part of the build was just planning it. Figuring out how to light it well, what size everything needs to be so that proportions and perspective would be correct for photography, all that stuff. The most satisfying moment was getting the characters all set up. That's when it all came together and just made me laugh.

What would be your dream D&D or art project if time and money were no object?

Well, if time and money were no object, I'd create a D&D-themed ren fair type event. If you can even call that a "project." I'd make tons of creature suits and props and create a whole environment for

fans to come dressed as their characters and other creatures. They could come to hang out at the pub, shop at vendors, enjoy entertainment from the bards, or have adventures in the woods where they slay a monster I've built, complete with practical magic and blood effects, of course. My dream is to create a place where you can really experience D&D. Then each year, I'd change it up to reflect the current game campaign setting. (Can you imagine an Underdark ren fair?) You know, with all that time and money I have.

Where can readers learn more about your work?

My work is visible on my website, www.danihartel.com, but if you want to see what I'm working on currently, follow me on [Instagram](#) and Twitter [@danihartel](#). I'm on [Facebook](#) too!

What other projects and art have you got in the offing? What's next for Dani Hartel?

There are some cool things coming up that I've been working on lately, but I can't talk about them quite yet! You definitely haven't seen the last of Dani Hartel.

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Introduction to the Tales of Yawning Portal

The next fourteen articles are all centered around
Tales from the Yawning Portal

For each of the adventures contained in Tales from the Yawning Portal we have included two articles: a short bit of fiction, followed by a feature article about the adventure in question, including interviews, behind-the-scenes stories, and a look at some of the artwork bringing these adventures to new life. See below for a table of contents, or just swipe onwards and dive right in!

The Sunless Citadel



Original designer Bruce R. Cordell talks about how the first adventure for third edition D&D introduced players to the game.

The Forge of Fury



Original creator Rich Baker takes a look back at a classic dungeon crawl in a ruined dwarven stronghold.

The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan



New fiction from Adam Lee and a fresh cartoon from Jason Thompson highlight this legendary ruin.

White Plume Mountain



Veteran fantasy illustrator Claudio Pozas reveals some of the artistic secrets of a revamped classic.

Dead in Thay



Scott Fitzgerald Gray provides some expert advice on how to survive the challenges of a megadungeon.

Against the Giants



From art order to finished illustration, explore the process of visually recreating a classic D&D adventure.

Tomb of Horrors



Raging Swan's Creighton Broadhurst describes dressing the classic *Tomb of Horrors*.

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Fiction: Sunless Citadel

By Bart Carroll

Perhaps the hour had grown too late, with too many drinks consumed. However it was, the patrons in the Yawning Portal started challenging one another with rumors they had heard. This evening, those rumors concerned the Sunless Citadel.

“Two kinds of fruit grow from the citadel’s Gulthias Tree,” Georgie Two Shoes started. “Red apples in summer, white apples in winter. One heals all illness, the other inflicts grievous harm.”

A small chorus of disapproval: “All that’s already known!”

“I wasn’t finished!”

The crowd quieted.

“Now. The story I heard concerned a grief-struck warlock, whose

beloved wife and fellow explorer was stricken with mummy rot. From a mummy lord, its rot too far advanced for any expected sort of healing. No temple could help. No cleric could even risk approaching the wife without being killed or catching the rot themselves. And so the warlock went in search of the Gulthias Tree for a desperate resolution. Either he would bring back the summer fruit to heal his wife, or eat the winter fruit himself and join her.”

“And so which was it?”

“Don’t know.”

More groans sounded from the other patrons.

“Hey,” Georgie said, “that’s the point of a story, isn’t it? Leaves things open-ended for the imagination.”

“I heard a different story.” It was Shay, the young elf, who spoke up. “About a dangerous game played between bored nobles. In Calimport, they brew liquor from each of the fruits, and challenge one another to a kind of duel. In pairs,” she said, “they drink one of the liquors at random—one noble to live, the other to suffer calamitously. ‘Potion miscibility’ they called their game, since you never knew the effects.”

“And I heard a different story still,” a third patron said. The old dwarf’s name was Snuff, and he was often by Shay’s side. “That seeds from the tree’s fruit grow into dangerous saplings. Twig blights. There’s an orchard where the blights are grown purposefully and in great number, chained to the ground—forming an impassable barrier around the orchard’s manor.”

“Do you know about how the Gulthias Tree first grew?” a new voice asked. This was Nibs, the gnome bard. “There was a druid long ago, who fell under the vampire curse. She went mad from her transformation—not least of which because she could no longer walk beneath the sun, through her groves and tending her plants.

“Instead, she retired to the Sunless Citadel, and began to plot new, dark magic. She wished for plants that would grow, thrive, and blossom beneath the light of the moon, not the sun; and she wished these plants to overtake all others, so that she could walk the world as

before. For a grave, this vampire slept buried within the soil at the bottom of the citadel. Former druids of her order tracked her there, and staked her heart. It's this stake, infected with the vampire's magic, that grew into the Gulthias Tree."

Nibs shrugged. "Another druid lurks there now, I'm told. Belak the Outcast. Also thrown out of his order for much the same madness—exploring magic he shouldn't. Now he's looking to tend the Gulthias Tree and its fruit for himself."

And now a voice came from the back of the tavern, low and full of menace. "While that may be true about a druid who tends the tree now, it wasn't a druid who first grew it. Gulthias—that name mean nothing to you? A vampire, in service to the dragon Ashardalon. That's who they staked, and from that stake grew his namesake tree."

As all the tale-tellers turned, it was Mary Greymalkin they saw—a warlock who came through the Portal now and again. Old and fearsome she was, with dull-gray ioun stones adorned throughout her wild-strewn hair, and said to carry a deck of many things somewhere in her possession. "Except that Gulthias survived," she said, "and left the Sunless Citadel for Nighthfang Spire. Where maybe he listens for who's speaking his name, to know who to keep watch over."

The low fire and the late hour alike cast shadows across the room, but none were darker than the warlock's words. "Be careful telling your tales. For Gulthias surely hears them as well."

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Q&A: Sunless Citadel

An Interview with Bruce R. Cordell

As introduced in *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, Bruce R. Cordell's *The Sunless Citadel* was the first published adventure for D&D's third edition. Ever since its appearance in 2000, the adventure has been widely regarded as an excellent way to introduce new players to the game, while also making a great starting experience for someone looking to be a Dungeon Master for the first time.

Asked if he felt any pressure from knowing that the adventure would provide many players with their first impressions of third edition, Bruce told us: "Maybe I should have, but I didn't feel daunted. I felt excited and energized. We

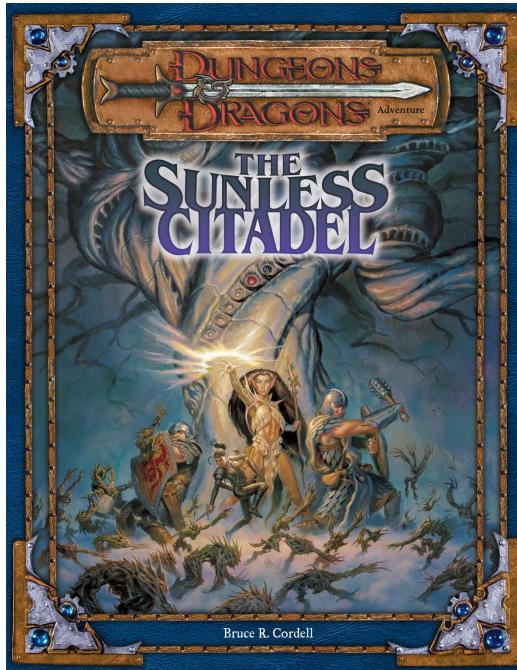


Bruce

knew this was a chance to bring people back into tabletop RPGs, after D&D had seemed about ready to dry up and blow away. If we could just provide an example on the page of the same kind of excitement we all still felt about the game, we figured we'd be in good shape.”

An award-winning game designer, Bruce worked on Dungeons & Dragons over the course of four editions as a writer and developer, including fifth edition D&D. In addition to *The Sunless Citadel*, over a hundred D&D books and articles bear his name, including *The Gates of Firestorm Peak*, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*, as does the 2010 revision of Gamma World. His more recent works include The Strange game line, *Gods of the Fall*, *Into the Outside*, and dozens of other titles for Numenera and the Cypher System from Monte Cook Games. And on top of all that, Bruce is the author of ten novels, including the *Abolethic Trilogy*, *Sword of the Gods*, and *Spinner of Lies* (all set in the Forgotten Realms), and his latest work *Myth of the Maker*, a novel of The Strange.

Bruce’s own introduction to D&D took place as “. . . a kid in Boy Scouts, watching the older kids play around under a lantern-lit picnic table by night. The DM was using those light-blue dungeon geomorphs and describing the scene to the players. An ogre squatted in the center of the corridor. Tied-up dwarves nearby struggled to get free, but the ogre



(Select to view)

When I got home, I asked my parents to buy me the starter set. I still have that box today.”

As evidenced by his own introduction to the game, Bruce is a firm believer in the idea that watching others play is the best way to approach RPGs. “It worked well for me, and Wizards of the Coast does something similar with its filmed celebrity games. And here at Monte Cook Games, we have [YouTube videos](#) with such imaginative but user-friendly titles as ‘How to Play The Strange’ and ‘How to Play Numenera.’ ”

When it came to *The Sunless Citadel*, the biggest challenge Bruce faced was to write an adventure using a set of rules that were still being actively developed at the time. “Several times, I had to deal with changes to specific mechanics as the core design team—Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, and Peter Adkison—updated their thinking. And on top of that, there were certain tenets of the game



design team where we generated a list of experiences that we wanted to make sure were part of an adventure that would be many people's first experience with this edition of the game."

One of the most important aspects of the new rule system was keeping close track of treasure and experience. This would allow DMs to know with relative certainty what the party's average level was going to be at any given point in the adventure—which was new thinking at the time. Another philosophy of the new edition was trying to carefully control the balance of each encounter, so as to not kill all the characters by accident. "Killing them purposefully, of course, is fine. Player characters need to know when to run!" (As it happened, this tactic became a big part of *The Forge of Fury*, the follow-up adventure to *The Sunless Citadel*.)

One of the most legendary elements of the adventure—the Gulthias Tree that is the source of the Sunless Citadel's evil—had its own fabled origin. According to Bruce, the tree developed out of a story one of his college roommates told him—an urban legend from the roommate's hometown, talking of a cemetery with a tree growing out of a grave.

that needed to be met. I had a brainstorming meeting with the

High school kids told of how the tree had grown up from a spike that killed someone on that very spot, and how if it were ever chopped down, the ghost of the murdered man would be released.

“In *The Sunless Citadel*, I used that story I’d heard and turned it into a vampire, because spike equals vampire in my head. That led to the entire storyline that the adventure path followed lightly, hit directly in *Heart of Nightfang Spire*, and concluded in *Bastion of Broken Souls*. ”

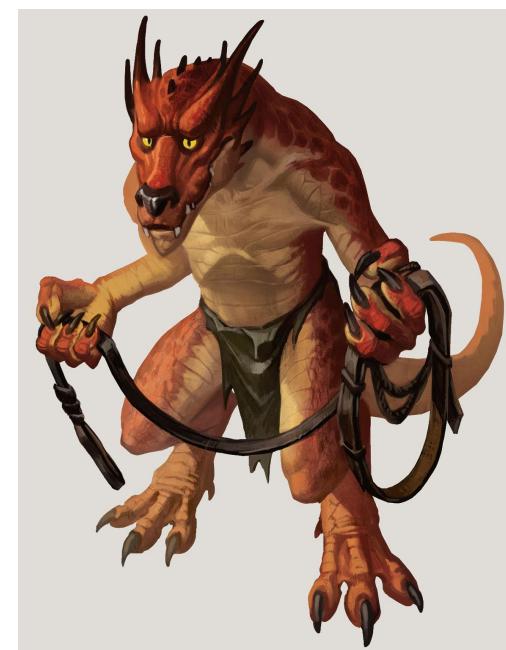


Almost as well remembered as the Gulthias Tree is the fame of a certain kobold NPC in *The Sunless Citadel*. Meepo debuted as the adventure’s innocuous “Keeper of Dragons,” then went on to appear in the Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures game, d20 Modern, and the Creature Competition that allowed players to vote for their favorite monsters on the D&D website. (Meepo lost to the ultimate winner, Eludecia the succubus paladin—but then defeated the tarrasque in a consolation round.) At the time, though, the idea of Meepo becoming so popular was

something Bruce had no expectation of.

“When I wrote the encounter introducing Meepo, I was just trying to create an interesting roleplaying scenario. One that would give even seasoned dungeon crawlers pause (“Wait, there’s a crying kobold in here?”), and which would provide those who enjoyed roleplaying an opportunity to do so. I wanted the characters to have a chance to meet a representative of one of the two groups of creatures living in the buried citadel in a way that wouldn’t lead immediately to conflict. And to give the PCs a way in if they wanted to ally with the kobold colony rather than wipe it out. Meepo accomplished all those goals. But I guess in doing so, he got a lot of use by most groups who played the adventure—and a lot of people played this adventure. His fame grew out of that. Predictable, but only in hindsight.”

Another of Bruce’s design tales concerns the Gulthias Tree’s troublesome offspring. “I wanted to create an iconic creature for this first adventure, so I designed these small animated creations of the evil druid called ‘twig wights,’ which seemed cool. But Jonathan Tweet approached me and asked if I would consider changing the name to something else, because ‘wight’ was a word for a specific kind of monster in D&D, and these animated bundles of sticks were not that. I wasn’t super-excited to do so at first, but by the time I got back to my desk, a name so similar that you might miss it if you didn’t look twice popped into my head. ‘Twig blight’ was actually better, given that blight is something plants are prone to, and helped solidify the creature’s design and demeanor. So, thanks, Jonathan!”



With *The Sunless Citadel* returning to D&D in *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, one obvious question for players unfamiliar



because it was during a long drive with Dee, who was my wife at the time. I was throwing ideas her way as we drove, lots of them alliterative—because I really like alliterative titles—but sort of crap. Anyway, I zeroed in on something like ‘Expedition to the Sunless Citadel.’ She just looked at me. I nodded and said, ‘Yeah, just Sunless Citadel.’ ”

As far as his current projects go with Monte Cook Games, Bruce says that the positive reception for his Numenera alternate dimension book *Into the Outside* and the recently released fantasy setting *Gods of the Fall* has been very gratifying. “In news of The Strange, we recently wrapped up a successful crowdfunding campaign for a deluxe boxed edition of the RPG. Folks who want to learn more can check out [this short video](#), the first part of which provides a quick overview of what The Strange is all about. Most exciting of all, *Myth of the Maker* was published last month by MCG as a deluxe hardcover, and by Angry Robot in trade paperback. I’m stoked!”

To hear more from Bruce Cordell about his current projects, check out www.brucecordell.com.

with the adventure concerns how the site got its memorable name. “Of course, it’s ‘sunless’ because it used to be a structure,” Bruce says. “A citadel, if you will, on the surface that was swallowed by the ground, becoming buried. So after that, it just got dubbed ‘the Sunless Citadel’ by the locals. Coming up with the adventure’s title is something I remember well,

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Fiction: Forge of Fury

By Adam Lee

Ropers.” The flint-eyed dwarf leaned in with a grin. “That’s how I’ve made my fortune, elfie. They’re loaded with treasure.”

“Ropers?” Shay, the young-for-an-elf ranger, had only heard the name of these monsters mentioned a time or two before. But ever since she’d started meeting with Snuff for pints on a regular basis at the Yawning Portal, it was clear by the old dwarf’s odd clothing, jewelry, and manner that he had seen much of the world.

“They’re dangerous. It’s why I haven’t told you this about them until I thought you and your friends were ready. But you can make a good living off ropers.”

Shay saw that Snuff’s tankard was getting dry, and waved to the server to fetch another. From her conversations with the dwarf, she had learned the tips that helped her and her friends find the Sunless

Citadel and survive their quest there—insights of where to look for traps and how to avoid kobold tricks.

And today, Snuff was sharing another lesson in making this business of dungeon crawling work. Shay got the fresh tankard and pushed it in front of the old dwarf, who took a new pull with just as much enjoyment as his first, several hours ago now.

“Ropers are worth the risk,” Snuff said as he wiped the foam from his beard with the back of his hand. “Your average roper can fetch you a good haul of gold and gems. But an ancient roper . . . well, it can set you up for a long time, but it’s the getting to any of them that’s hard. You have to come across caves well trafficked by adventurers or foolish merchants looking for a shortcut under or through a mountain. Ropers have to get their loot from somewhere.”

“If they’re loaded with loot, why haven’t I heard about any of their caves?” Shay said, taking another bite of a pork pie.

“Usually a roper kills the whole party. They’ve got the tentacles for it.” Snuff waved his stubby fingers about. “Or the party fails to look inside the roper’s gut.”

“Oh?” Shay didn’t like the sound of tentacles. “You have to cut them open?”

“Exactly. A roper has a stony hide, tougher than a xorn’s. You have to go in through its maw and down its gullet if you want the goods. Do you have a halfling in your group?”

“Yeah, Georgie Two Shoes.”

“Is he squeamish?”

“Nope, he’s half-crocked most of the time. Little guy’s got a cast-iron belly.”

“Well, have him get in there with a sharp knife and cut down into the base. It’ll smell like an otyugh’s midden when he cuts into the gut where the gold and gems will be, and have him be careful. It’s filled with a fluid that will digest just about anything, but an alchemist will pay a pretty penny for it.”

They made for odd drinking fellows, some might have thought, the young elf and her old dwarf mentor. Dwarves seldom opened up all that easily, often keeping their secrets of lost treasure as tightly held as a roper's own. But over time, Snuff had taken to sharing with Shay the old tales of his past life as a soldier, and the young elf felt honored to have gained that level of trust.

"So, where might you find one of these caves?" Shay skewered a bit of cheese with a long-tined fork.

"Glad you asked, elfie." Snuff sat back in his chair and reached into his old leather pack. Out came a folded piece of vellum. He placed it on the table and put his large hands over it, then raised a bushy eyebrow at Shay. "Have you heard of a place called Khundrukár?"

Snuff unfolded the map as he continued. Shay couldn't take her eyes off its drawings of mountain paths, towns, and roads. All of it was meticulously inscribed with Dwarvish script, filling her with curiosity and excitement.

"An old dwarven foundry built by the master smith, Durgeddin. He built it as a stronghold, a place where he could forge his masterworks, but orcs tracked him down and raided the foundry. Word has it that the orcs are still there, desecrating the forges." Snuff instinctively made a fist. The thought of orcs pillaging the forge had clearly hit a nerve, and Shay could feel the old dwarf's sorrow as it passed over him. "No matter. They'll feel Moradin's hammer soon enough."

"Maybe they'll feel Corellon's arrow first," Shay said with a smile.

"Aye elfie, either will do in a pinch. But here's where the orcs end." Snuff pointed to the map with a stubby forefinger. "This here's the Glimmerhame. It's an ancient cavern complex, whose walls are said to be encrusted with semiprecious stones. But don't get too dazzled, because I'm betting that's where the roper will be. If not there, then the sinkhole that's a deeper level of the cavern. Believe me, if he's there, that old boy will be fat with gems and gold."

"Wouldn't the orcs have got to it by now?"

"Orcs will steer clear of a roper. They're a superstitious lot, and some orcs believe that ropers are the embodiment of Ogrémoch's own

curses. But I'm sure many adventurers have given up their goods, looking at the glittering walls and not watching out for that old fellow." Snuff pushed the map toward Shay.

"Khundrukár, huh?" Shay folded up the map and put it carefully into her pack. The thought of finding a dwarven hoard of gold or a cache of weapons hidden for centuries skipped around her mind, filling her with excitement. She couldn't wait to gather her party at the Portal and tell them of Khundrukár. Even old Georgie Two Shoes might sober up for this one. "Many thanks, Snuff. This could be a good haul for us."

"It's more than that, elfie. If you can clear out those orcs, it would do my dwarven heart good. That's why I'm trusting you with the map."

"I'll see what I can do. Our warrior has no love for orcs, so you might get your wish." Shay pushed back from the table and got up, but not before setting a few coins down. "This one's on me, Snuff. You've been too kind." And she meant it.

The tales were one thing. But it was when Snuff had started to teach her all he knew about adventuring—how to keep the party together, how to lead a group, how to strategize, how to fight certain monsters—that Shay had gained truly unforeseen gifts. Ones that she valued over any other dwarven hoard.

"If you come by any of Durgeddin's weapons, let me know," Snuff said as Shay turned to leave. "I know some of Moradin's finest who would pay dearly for them."

"Snuff, if half of this is true, we'll bring back everything our pack mules can carry, and you can take your pick."

As she walked out of the Portal, Snuff raised his glass to her.

"Happy adventuring," he said with a wink.

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Q&A: The Forge of Fury

An Interview with Richard Baker

Characters who succeeded in *The Sunless Citadel* were ready to take on third edition D&D's next set of challenges with *The Forge of Fury*. According to designer Richard Baker, the basic mission statement for the early third edition adventures was simple: execute a classic "middle of the fairway" D&D experience so that people coming into the game would immediately see what sorts of adventures they could create with it.



"I thought it over for a few hours," Rich says, "and settled on a

dungeon crawl in a ruined dwarven stronghold as a classic theme for an adventure. In the mid-90s, TSR published a lot of story-based adventures, and I felt that we needed some good ‘back to the dungeon’ material and tried to push that way when I got the chance. (Monte Cook held a similar view.) So I always loved me some dungeon crawls, and *The Forge of Fury* gave me the perfect excuse to write one.”



(Select to view)

A former US Navy officer, Richard Baker began his career as a professional game designer in 1991. He started at TSR, Inc., then joined Wizards of the Coast in 1997. With TSR and WotC, Rich contributed to products such as the *Birthright Campaign Setting*, the Alternity science fiction roleplaying game, third edition Dungeons & Dragons and its *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, the fourth edition *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, and the revised Gamma World game. More recently, he contributed to fifth edition *Dungeons & Dragons*

with *Lost Mine of Phandelver* (part of the *Starter Set*) and *Princes of the Apocalypse*. He’s also the author of ten Forgotten Realms novels, including the New York Times bestseller *Condemnation* and the highly acclaimed *Last Mythal* trilogy.



Rich's first introduction to D&D came back in the seventh grade, when he walked over to a nearby hobby shop to look for models to build. "A small group of my classmates were playing a game at a table right by the door. The first edition *Monster Manual* was sitting right on the table. I picked it up for a closer look, and caught the fever!"



"When I first started playing, I'd play with my friends Bud and John.

We noticed that the rulebooks kept talking about parties of characters, so we'd have two players at a time, each running a party of six characters. Two rival parties exploring a dungeon at the same time! Hilarious hijinks ensued." According to Rich, it took him and his friends a little while to figure out what they were doing wrong.

(As it happened, that multiparty approach did come into play many years later with adventures such as *Vault of the Dracolich* and the original release of *Dead in Thay*.)

When it comes to "figuring out the game," Rich believes that the same philosophies often apply to figuring out adventures. *The Forge of Fury*, for example, rewards careful planning. "As DMs, we tend to train players to assume that we won't put any obstacle in front of them that they can't defeat. Players also tend to discount the value of defenses like arrow slits and strong gates. The legendarily tough 'frontal assault' on the Mountain Door in *The Forge of Fury* offers a chance to help players rethink their assumptions. I'd encourage DMs running the adventure to be generous in letting players retreat—that's where you can step in and provide a little help."

This sense of obstacles that can't be defeated inspired an encounter with a particularly nasty roper. "That was actually one of the few 'make sure the adventure teaches X' objectives that was handed to me when I started work on *The Forge of Fury*. Our creative leadership asked me to make sure the adventure included a monster that was too tough for the PCs, so that they'd learn it's okay to run away sometimes. I figured out that the monster needed to be someplace out of the way, so that you wouldn't have to go through it in order to complete the adventure. A roper seemed like a great option to me. First, they're slow, so it's easy to run away from one. Second, it's a cavern monster and a D&D classic, so it fit thematically. And third, its high challenge rating meant that it was, in fact, too tough for a 3rd-level party.



“Of course, I might have downplayed the fact that ropers grab people, and that you can’t very well run away when you’re being dragged helplessly to its maw. So sorry about that.”

Another dangerous encounter was featured on the adventure’s original cover. “We wanted to make sure a dragon appeared somewhere in almost all of the initial third edition adventures. I mean, it’s in the name of the game, right? Nightscale, the dragon in *The Forge of Fury*, is especially nasty because she gets to fight in an environment that’s perfect for her.”

From an early playtest of that encounter, Rich recalls how coworker Curt Gould played a gnome sorcerer. “He levitated to make sure he was out of reach of any attacks from the water, then started to *magic missile* Nightscale to death. It was pretty effective, especially considering no one else was having any luck landing hits on the dragon. So Nightscale decided she’d had enough and took to the air. She flew up to the levitating sorcerer, mauled him to –8 hp in midair, and then left. The other PCs looked up at this unconscious gnome bobbing in the air twenty feet over their heads . . . and just watched

him bleed out, since no one could figure out how to get him down or how to get the cleric up.”



Curt (still supply chain director at Wizards of the Coast) remembers those playtest sessions well. “The dragon was a surprise. We knew the area was dangerous, but to have a dragon come out of the water was a big shock. That had to have been one of the first third edition dragon battles, so no one knew quite what to expect. My subsequent demise was one of my favorite character deaths. I remember getting mauled and the party expecting me to drop to the ground, but instead I hung in the air as I bled out. We could all

visualize the situation, and it was both sad and amusing at the same time. I roleplayed a dying gnome as best I could, which consisted of saying, ‘drip drip drip’ on my turn.”

In terms of strategic approaches, Rich Baker advises that for players, the smart thing to do when fighting a dragon is to spread out enough that you can’t all be hit by the same breath weapon—but not so far that you can’t quickly charge over to support one another when the dragon decides to close in and maul an isolated character.



And as for the dragon's tactics?

“Make the party spread out, then close in and maul the character no one is close enough to help. Good times!”

Rich’s current projects see him split his time between writing fiction and publishing small-press game products through [Sasquatch Game Studio](#)—founded with fellow Wizards of the Coast alumni Dave Noonan and Steve Schubert. “My first big project is a brand-new military-themed science fiction series, the first book of which is entitled *Valiant Dust*. It’ll be published in November by Tor Books, and I’m super proud of it! Mash up Horatio Hornblower with rail guns, warp drives, imperialism, and great-power rivalries, and you’ll see where I’m going with the series.

“The other big thing I’m working on with my fellow Sasquatches is the new [Alternity Science Fiction Roleplaying Game](#). Our game draws inspiration from the sci-fi game published by TSR back in

1997, for which I was part of the design team. We're building a modern, one-book RPG that features plenty of hat tips to the mechanics of the older game. We've just released the **beta-test version of the game's quickstart guide**, and our Kickstarter went live in April for the *Alternity Core Rulebook* (ending on 5/4—May the Fourth be with us!). We're also offering sourcebooks that expand on starships and aliens, and another that presents a brand-new Alternity campaign setting in the format of a linked adventure anthology.”

You can keep up to date with Rich and his work at [his blog](#) and at [Sasquatch Game Studio](#).

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Fiction: The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan

By Adam Lee

Spend enough time within the Yawning Portal and you're going to hear some names crop up from time to time. Names of places that are proving grounds for folks itching to dip their toes into the waters of adventure. Here in Waterdeep, you'll hear about Undermountain, the largest dungeon in these parts. That's the entrance over there if you're feeling all fired up like some crazed loot-monkey, thinking you're going to go in and get rich.

But there are other names that you don't hear about so often. Names of dungeons that are so sought after, so hard to reach, that only the hardest and savviest—or the dumbest and greediest—of adventurers can find them. The plunder pulled out of these dungeons is truly spectacular, because they're too well hidden or dangerous for run-of-

the-mill grave robbers.

See that thing over there? That's a stuffed hyenodon head. Bet you never seen one of those before. Looks just like the real thing, and about scared me out of my skivvies when I first saw it. I got it in a dungeon—a ruined temple covered in thick jungle, a place called Tamoachan. You ever hear of it? I hadn't either, until our guide told me about it. That was long before he stole our food and left us for dead. I'll tell you right now, Tamoachan is a death trap. That place is filled with so many ways to perish that it makes my head spin. I wouldn't send my own worst enemy to that dungeon, so if you hear some ninnymuggins talking about taking a trip there, steer clear!

There were four of us, and we thought we were prepared for anything, but Tamoachan had other plans. The first of us, a good bloke named Hap the Fierce, got taken by a nereid. Have you ever seen one of them? Well let me tell you, you better have your head screwed on straight if you come across one of them creatures. Charm you right out of your pantaloons and into the afterlife if you're not careful—and Hap wasn't the careful type. He got all googly-eyed and waded right into her pool looking for a kiss, lips all puckered up like a guppy, not even paying a mind to all of us hollering like baboons for him to come back. Pow! She gave him a kiss, all right, and old Hap didn't look too fierce at the end there.

We were all pretty shook up, but we were pulling some serious loot out of that place, so we elected to head in further—behind the next door could be the real score! It was all going so well until the wagon went off the track. Sacha was our thief, and had the lightest fingers in the business. She could swipe an egg from under a chicken without even a cluck. But in Tamoachan, she got a little too greedy for her own good and tried one egg too many. Now, I'm all for pilfering a few trinkets, but when those trinkets belong to a vampire, even I know that'll get you deader than lich dust. I'll give you some free advice, my friend—keep your grubby mitts off vampire loot. Unless you're at White Plume Mountain. I hear there's quite the pretty hammer hidden there.

Wait, where was I? Right. Well, at that point, it was me and the bard, so you know what kind of trouble I was in. And no offense to the College of Lore, if you're an alum. We were loaded down with loot

and still hadn't explored all of Tamoachan, but we were having our doubts. He was a plucky elf, always the optimist, but I noticed that he wasn't even so much as humming a tune. We both knew we had to get out of there, even though we wanted to try one more door. That's the adventurer's curse, so heed my words and leave that last door shut. Now, I always thought that elves were usually quite nimble, but this poor fiddler wound up getting caught in a sand trap. Don't ask me how. Everything happened so fast.

I made it out alive, but I'll always think about all the loot we left behind. Tamoachan still has secrets and treasures to be revealed. As I sit here, mulling over my ale, it gets me to wondering who comes up with these godsforsaken dungeons? Some crazy wizard or lich with nothing better to do than think of fiendish ways to protect their loot or their scraggly, desiccated bones? Beats the heck out of me. All I know is that I've hung up my wandering boots and am happy just to sit here in the Portal, swigging ale and watching other adventurers come and go.

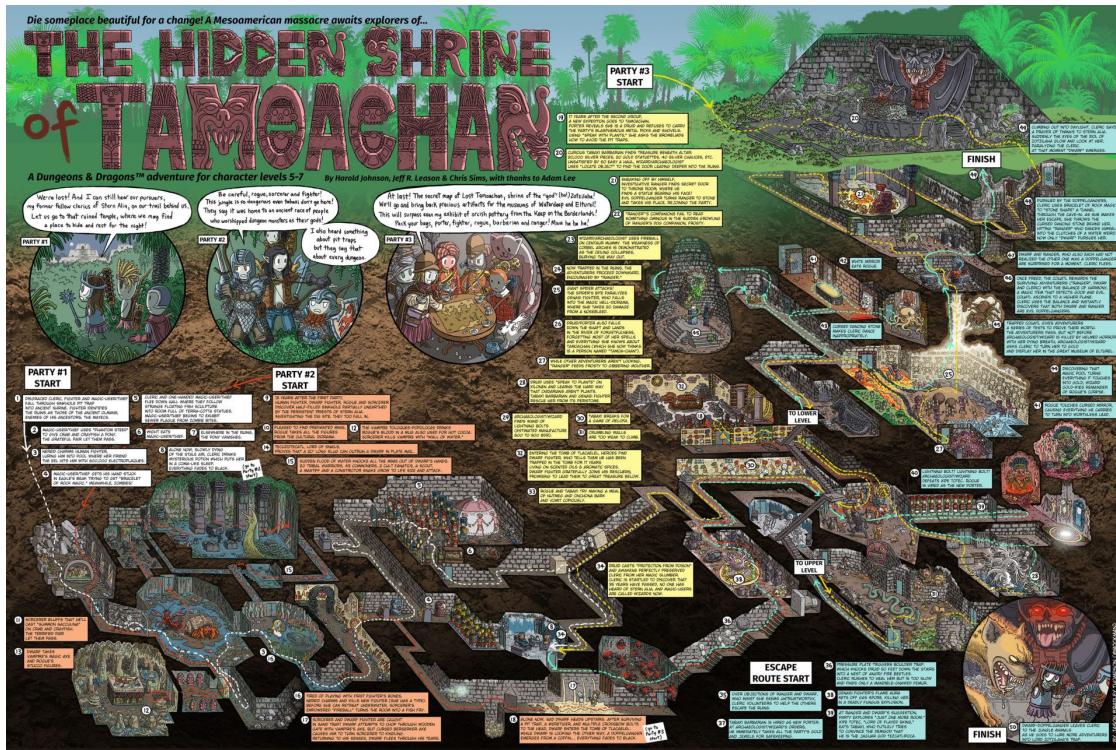
And who knows? Maybe you'll be the next to bring something in here worth talking about.

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Comic: The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan

By Jason Thompson

Cartoonist Jason Thompson returns with another glorious cartoon walkthrough map, celebrating the Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan! The original adventure was published in 1980, authored by Harold Johnson and Jeff R. Leason. This time, we follow not one but three parties (including one party linked to Adam Lee's accompanying fiction) navigating the shrine and all its dangers—the Lord of Snails included! Be warned, potential spoilers abound...



(Select to view)

[Hi-res image here](#)

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Die someplace beautiful for a change! A Mesoamerican massacre awaits explorers of...

THE HIDDEN SHRINE of TAYMOACHAAR

A Dungeons & Dragons™ adventure for character levels 5-7

By Harold Johnson, Jeff R. Leason & Chris Sims, with thanks to Adam Lee

We're lost! And I can still hear our pursuers, my former fellow clerics of Stern Alia, on our trail behind us! Let us go to that ruined temple, where we may find a place to hide and rest for the night!

Be careful, rogue, sorcerer and fighter!
This jungle is so dangerous even tabaxi don't go here.
They say it was home to an ancient race of people
who worshipped dungeon masters as their gods!

I also heard something about pit traps but they say that about every dungeon.

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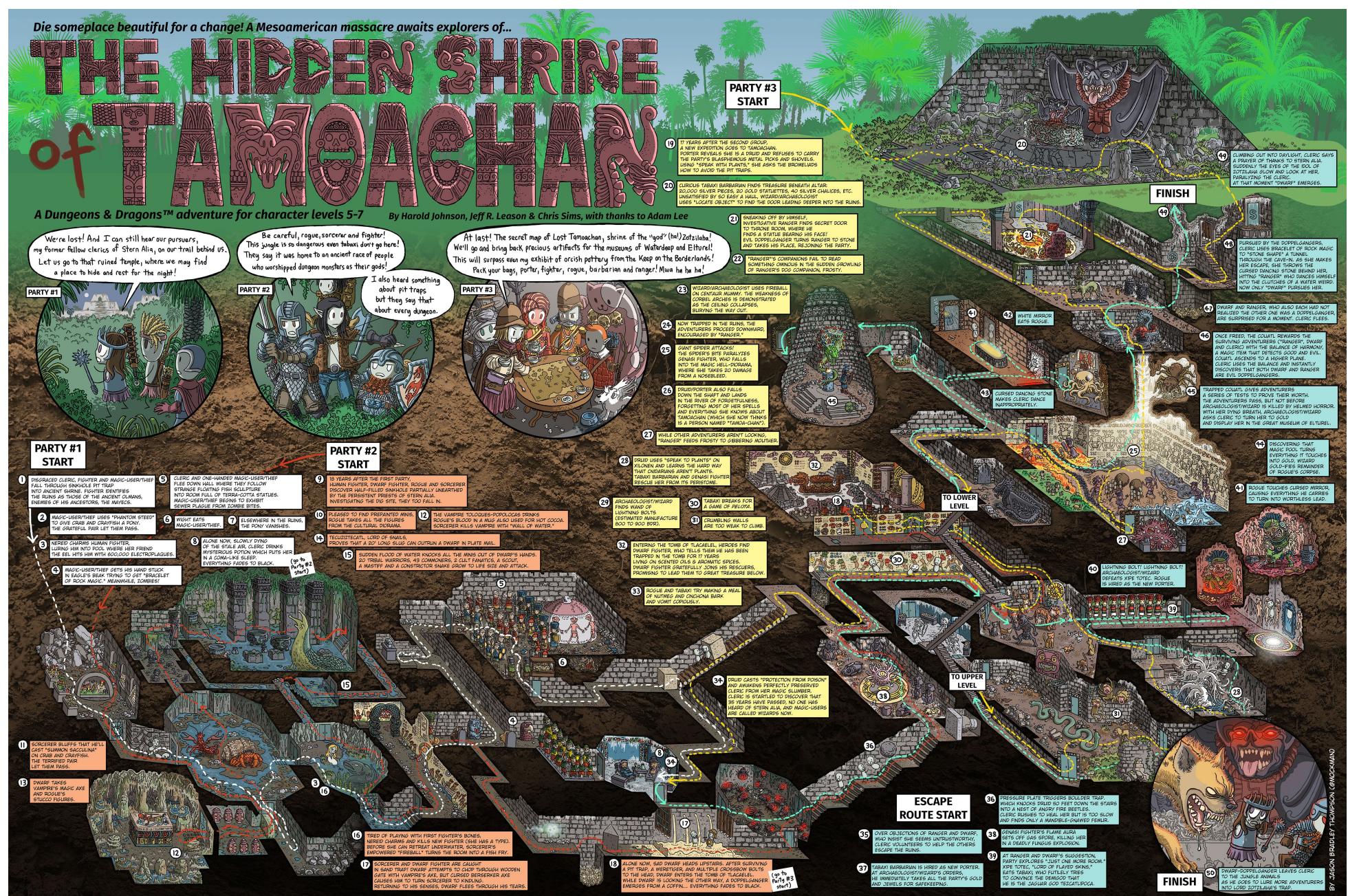
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Fiction: White Plume Mountain

By Bart Carroll

Durnan said nothing as the ranger entered his bar. He rarely did. Anyone who paid sufficient coin was given drink. Anyone who paid still more was granted access down the Yawning Portal's well. Beyond that, the barkeep kept out of his patrons' affairs.

The ranger wore a tattered old town banner for a cloak, held in place by an emblem of the Emerald Enclave. One of the patrons (far less taciturn than Durnan) noticed the slick scars and the burns visible on the ranger's hands and arms, and chuckled. "Looks like you've spent some time locked inside Duke Zalto's maul. All battered and burned, what happened to you?"

"Raising a hell hound whelp," the ranger replied. "New companion in training."

The other patrons couldn't tell if he was joking or not, but they

glanced at the sketch he set down on the bar. Drawn by a local gnome artist, in pigments ground from components normally meant for potions and spells, its subject came to vibrant life.

“Burket?” someone said, recognizing the sketch. “Why’s he wanted?”

“Banditry. Waged against those poor souls leaving Beliard, fleeing Bloody-beard the giant. Hurt a dog of mine, protecting a boy among them.”

“Well, you won’t find him here. Made his way out toward White Plume Mountain, I heard. Took up with a lover. Snarla, they called her. Don’t know why. Maybe wolf blood in her.”

All who heard the pronouncement knew that if it were true, the ranger would have just as little chance of apprehending Burkett in either location. For if the desperate tried their luck down the well of the Yawning Portal, the truly desperate headed for White Plume Mountain.

The folk assembled in the tavern soon took up the debate.

“Keraptis—I hear he’s always looking for new sellswords. The more unscrupulous, the better, to guard his mountain fortress.” No one knew much about what lay beneath the mountain—only that in recent days, a number of criminals had evaded capture, and were rumored to have escaped into Keraptis’s employ.

“I heard Sir Bluto also made his way there some months back,” someone opined. Sir Bluto Sans Pite, fallen knight. Fallen far. There remained a heavy price on his head, no matter where in Faerûn he fled. “Took a number of lackeys with him—fallen squires and hirelings who did their former masters harm.”

“What, torchbearers who let their employer’s light run down? Left them in the dark?”

“Not this crew. Torchbearers more apt to light their employers’ houses on fire then make off in the night. Keraptis is welcome to that blackguard crew.”

“Keraptis? That wizard already died, some twelve, maybe thirteen

hundred years ago. I say it's just the criminals taking hold of his old dungeon for themselves. A hideout of the most treacherous sort, with Keraptis's old traps and rumors left in place to guard against lawful prosecution. That's what I say."

"There you are, then," someone said, and by their nodding, all the other patrons were in agreement. If the ranger wanted Burkett, Bluto, Snarla, and the rest, he'd need to take his chances against them under White Plume Mountain. Through the Twisted Thickets, the cursed ruins of Castle Mukos, and out past Dead Gnoll's Eye Socket.

"Search ye far or search ye near," someone muttered, "you'll find no trace of them walking anywhere free beneath the sun."

"Better take my leave in that case. Long way to White Plume." The ranger turned and left the bar, and they all knew he wasn't joking then.

But still, if rangers cast their snares and nets around the Yawning Portal, wiser criminals likewise set watch against such hunters.

After the ranger left, another patron slipped out soon afterward. A former torchbearer, perhaps.

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Q&A: White Plume Mountain

An Interview with Claudio Pozas

In tales from the yawning portal, the adventure *White Plume Mountain* (originally published in 1979) is introduced as “a subject of superstitious awe to the neighboring villagers. People still travel many miles to gaze upon this natural wonder, though few will approach it closely, as it is reputed to be the haunt of various demons and devils. The occasional disappearance of those who stray too close to the Plume reinforces this belief.”

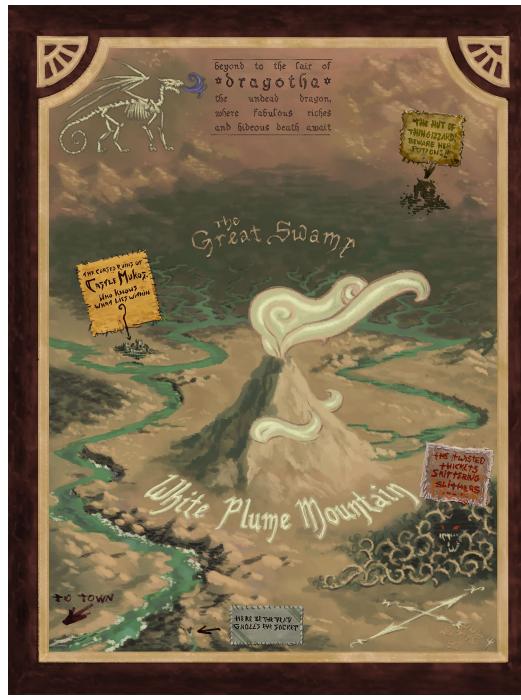
For this updated version of *White Plume Mountain*, veteran fantasy illustrator Claudio Pozas created a new rendition of the adventure’s area map (showcased in our [last issue](#), and referenced in our [throwback to Dragotha](#), as well as

new interior artwork. However, his creative connection with this D&D classic actually dates back to issue 212 of *Dungeon* magazine.

Back in the days before online stores and downloads, Claudio never got to actually play the original *White Plume Mountain*—although he did run *The Temple of Elemental Evil* (“Where yes, my players did recover the broadsword *Scather* and the *Orb of Golden Death*”), as well as *Ravenloft* (“Where the PCs died before getting any of the relics”). But during the later days of fourth edition, then-senior producer Chris Perkins tasked Claudio with writing “Never Say Die” for *Dungeon*—an adventure set in the Twisted Thickets and Dead Gnoll’s Eye Socket on the outskirts of White Plume Mountain.



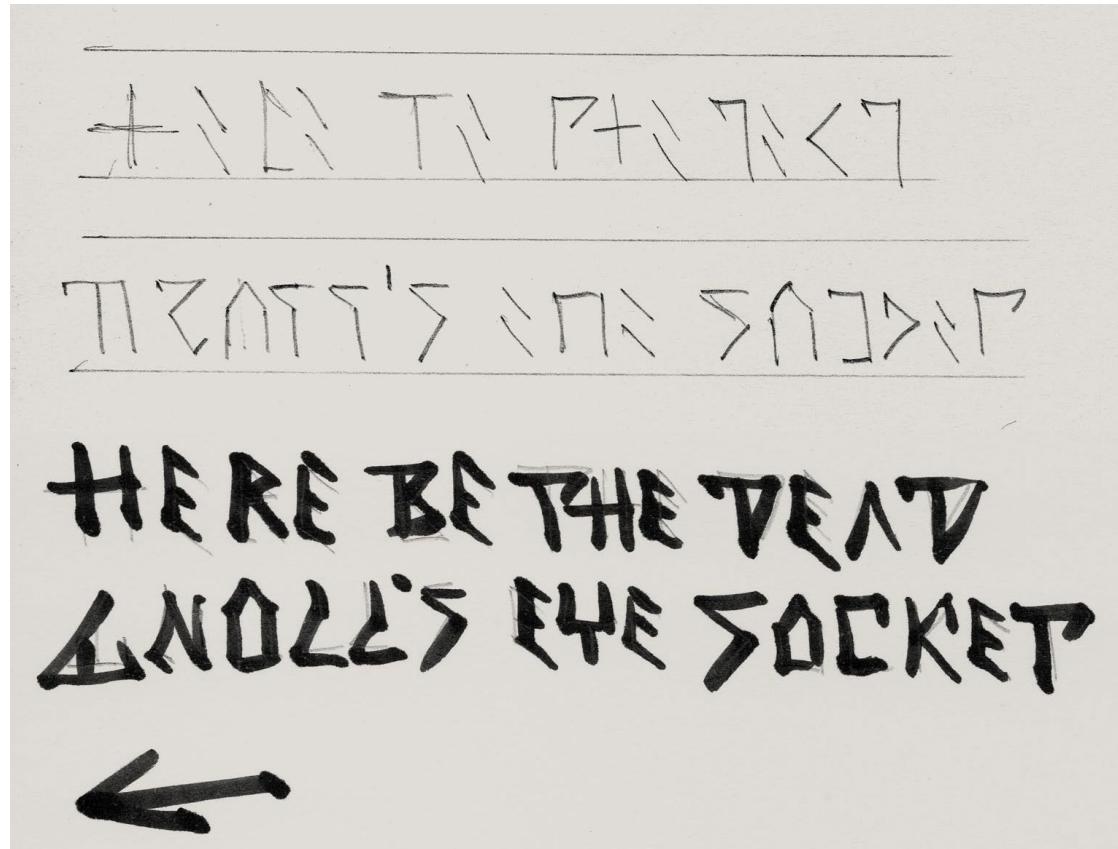
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When it came to depicting the mountain and surrounding environs, the art order for *Tales from the Yawning Portal* asked Claudio to reinterpret the original adventure's area map by Erol Otus as an object that could exist inside the game world—perhaps a tapestry or an illuminated manuscript. “Since I had already used the manuscript idea for the Great Wheel map in the *Player’s Handbook*,” Claudio says, “I decided to pursue the tapestry idea. Something like the Bayeux Tapestry wouldn’t allow me the

necessary details, so I looked into later, more advanced techniques. That led me to the Manufacture des Gobelins, a tapestry factory in Paris that has been in the business since the late 1400s—and whose French name ‘gobelin’ is the origin of the word *goblin*.



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“That style of tapestry informed my creation of the map as something that might have been commissioned by a local ruler, with later notations added by the adventurers who had braved White Plume Mountain over the years. You can find hints of these adventurer’s personalities and stories in the way they wrote the map’s notations. For instance, ‘Dead Gnoll’s Eye Socket’ is written in Common, but the handwriting is based on the Dwarven alphabet from the *Player’s Handbook*, so you can tell that this was written by a dwarf adventurer.”



(Select to view)

Claudio's assignment for the updated adventure also included creating illustrations of its three famed weapons, *Whelm*, *Wave*, and *Blackrazor*—which came with its own challenges. “Whenever I work with something that has a legacy in D&D lore, I always begin by researching what was done before and trying to pay homage to that—or at least include an Easter egg or two. In addition to wanting the pictures to serve as visual aids to the players, I wanted them to form a cohesive group, with all three depicted from the same angle.”



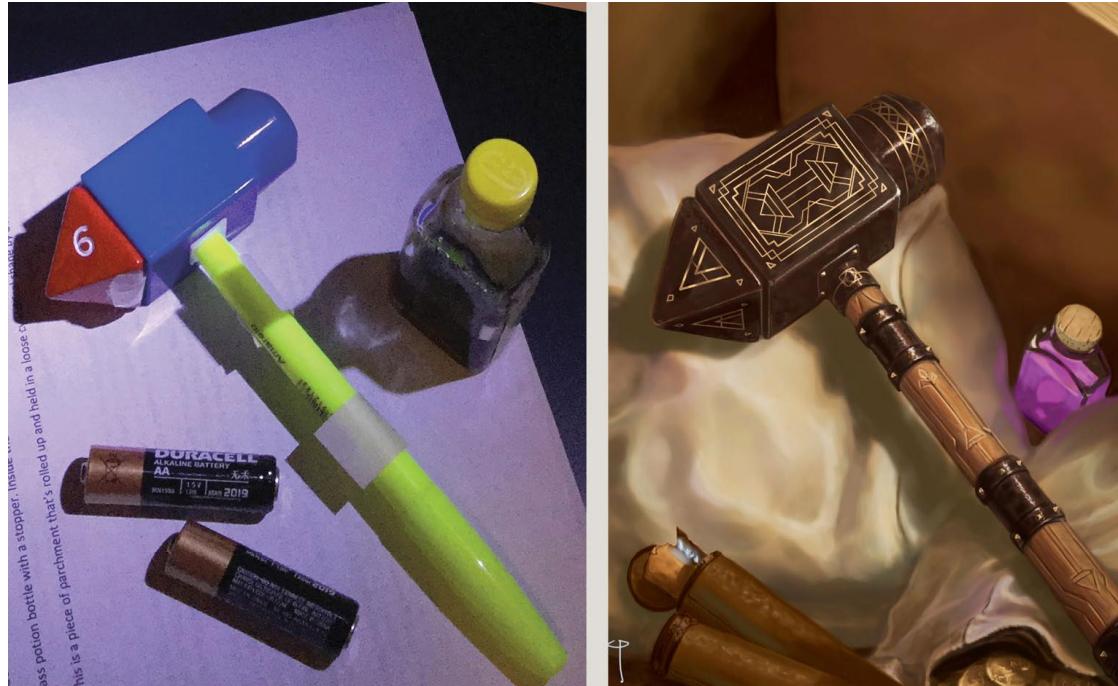
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Of the three weapons, only *Blackrazor* had been previously depicted

with any consistency. On the back cover of the original *White Plume Mountain*, artist Bill Willingham (of *Fables* fame) depicted *Blackrazor* as a long blade with a rather small crossguard. “That characteristic remained constant in later depictions, including mine. I also looked at pictures of raw and polished obsidian to get the textures right. And there’s an Easter egg from the original adventure in *Blackrazor*’s illustration.”

“For *Wave*, I drew my initial inspiration from the gorgeous *trident of fish command* in the fifth edition *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, but had it made of silver, following the weapon’s description, with lots of flowing shapes depicting seahorses, seashells, and cresting waves. You can see that the design changed very little from the initial sketch.”

“For *Whelm*, the art order described it as having a blunt point on one end (as opposed to the mallet-like look found in most fantasy warhammers). From there, I crafted a miniature model of *Whelm* using a giant d8, a building toy, and a marker. That gave me a good, unique shape for the hammer, which I then decorated with some art deco engravings to reflect its dwarven origin. If it were elven, I’d have used art nouveau.”



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Beyond its three famed weapons, *White Plume Mountain* is also known for its elaborate traps and puzzle rooms—whether a series of

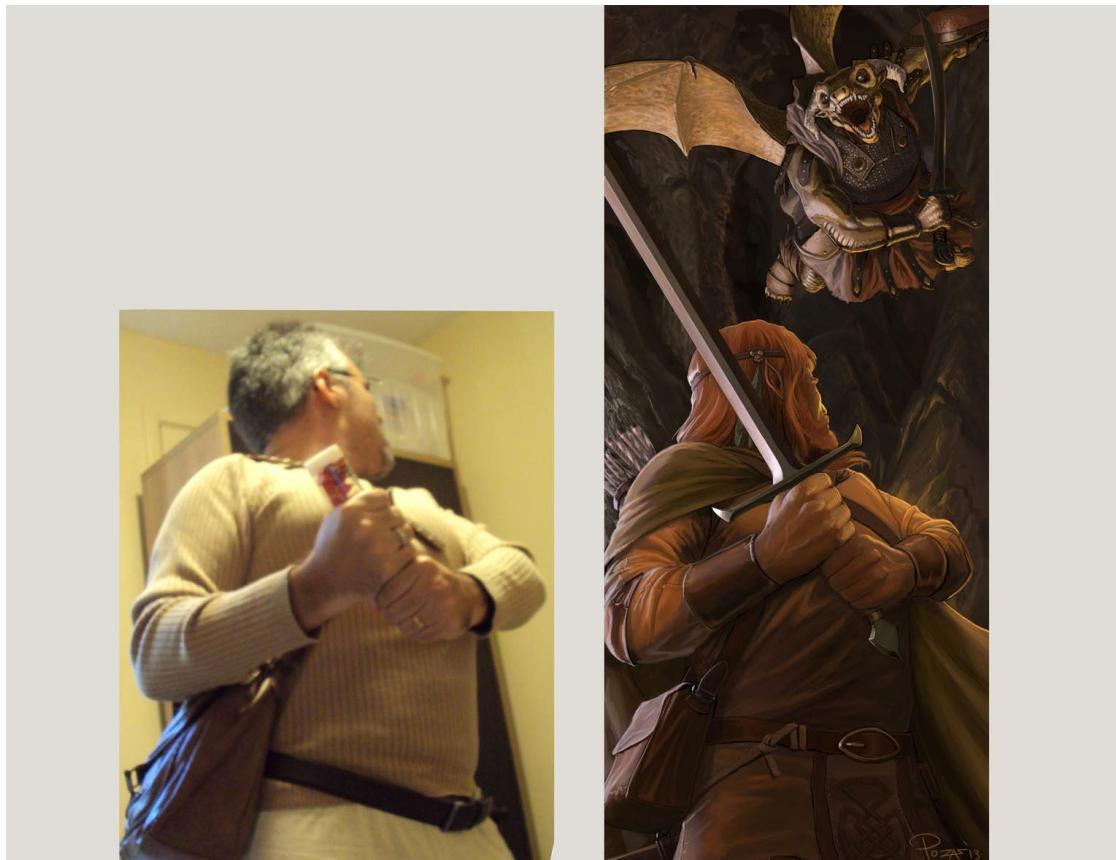
platforms suspended from chains, a river floating in midair, or an elaborate inverted ziggurat.

“Ah, yes, the terraced aquarium!” Claudio says. “That was a tricky piece. Since the main purpose of the illustration was to serve as a visual aid for players, I had to get the structure just right. So I built a model of the ziggurat in Lego and took several pictures of it from different angles, in order to sketch my thumbnails. The scale was ten feet per one-by-one piece.”



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“Illustrators who work with imaginative realism—the most common description for the style of art seen in D&D books—tend to stage photos for reference, as that always provides additional information we would never include if we worked straight from our minds. For that purpose, I have a couple of plastic swords and shields, a couple of toy guns, and a pair of desk lamps to control the lighting. Most of the time, I end up being my own manikin!”



Claudio as Tanis (select to view)

When asked which of *White Plume Mountain*'s artifacts he himself would select, Claudio says that of the three, *Wave* would be his choice. “I live in Rio de Janeiro, which is an oceanside city, so I’d get good mileage out of its powers. And *Wave*’s attachment to sea deities means it’ll be right at home, since lots of Brazilians pay homage to Yemanjá, the African orisha of the sea.”

Claudio Pozas has worked in the gaming industry as both an artist and a writer since 2000. His first published D&D work as a writer was “The Green Dweomer” in *Dragon* 273 (July 2000). In 2001, he started illustrating the award-winning Counter Collection series for Fiery Dragon Productions. After a decade working for third-party publishers, he returned to D&D with the “Channel Divinity: Sehanine” article in *Dragon* 386 (April 2010). For fifth edition, Claudio has contributed illustrations to the *Player’s Handbook* and *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, the adventures *Princes of the Apocalypse* and *Out of the Abyss*—and now, *Tales from the Yawning Portal*. Claudio lives in his native Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. You can see his artwork and buy prints at www.claudiopozas.com.

MAPS AND CARTOONS

This issue of *Dragon+* features downloadable maps for *White Plume Mountain*—both the overall dungeon and several of its interior rooms—by cartographer Jason A. Engle. To discover more of Jason’s work, visit [his website](#).



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(High-res annotated version [here](#))

Cutaway View

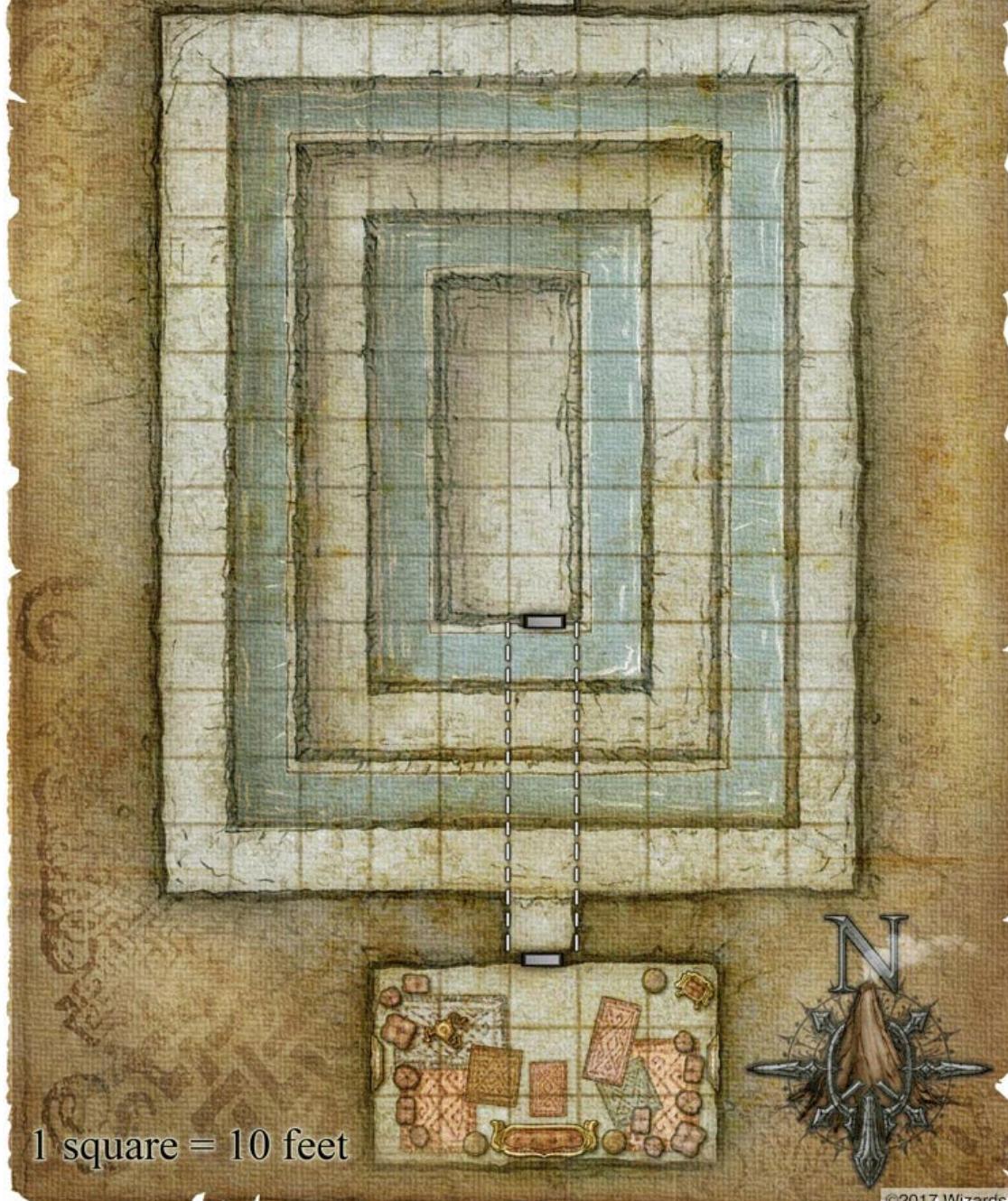


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Aquarium and Prison



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Geysers and Chains



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Fiction: Dead in Thay

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

Can't remember when I first saw her in the Yawning Portal. But I remember the night I recognized her. Not sure why it took me so long, but there was magic in her disguise, no doubt. She kept her hood up always; didn't matter how hot the fire was burning. Always starting on the top balcony, staring down, then wandering all three floors through the evening.

She bumped into me that way one night, folks standing shoulder to shoulder in the taproom. Broke her spell I guess when I touched her, just enough so that I saw a shaved head covered in tattoos underneath that hood. Dark eyes that I warrant never smiled. A Red Wizard of Thay, sauntering through Durnan's place like she owned it.

She didn't say a word when I denounced her to everyone within earshot, asked her loud-like what a deceiver like her was doing in

Waterdeep. Asked her straight out who her master was, because all the Red Wizards have one. Those zulkirs they serve, liches and archmages every one. I asked her what malice she was up to, standing tall so she'd understand she wouldn't get away with it.

"Looking for someone," was all she said as she turned away, that Thayan accent like a serpent's hiss. She didn't show any surprise when I spun her around, I'll give her that much. I told her that she'd need a better story than that. And there was dark fire in her eyes as she took my measure and spoke.

"You want to know whom I seek?" she said. "I seek heroes wise enough to understand that an evil dwells in the east that will not rest until it spreads from Thay to the Sword Coast and consumes every land between. I seek the champions of the Sword Coast. Those willing to stand against the plots of Szass Tam, and strong enough to survive that stand. I seek heroes who will hear of a fortress that has withstood every attempt at assault and incursion, and whose only thought will be 'Until now.' I seek adventurers who, faced with an army of undead, will simply shrug because they know that even armies can fall one soldier at a time."

Folk around us were listening in then, so she stepped up like she might be hawking broadsheets on Bazaar Street. "Think of the most potent magic every woman and man in this place has ever coveted. Think of the greatest perils any of you have ever faced. Then place that magic and those perils in a single site, and let it all run unchecked. Imagine game forests where you are the hunted, not the hunter, and where your attacks against the creatures tearing you apart will only heal them.

"You think these things are fancy? I have seen them. I have labored in the grottos and the cages of the Doomvault, where Szass Tam breeds a monstrous army to be unleashed across Faerûn in endless waves. I seek those brave enough to join with the Red Wizards sworn to stop him. I seek those not afraid of wards that will strip flesh from bones, of illusion and curse magic that will undermine your very sense of self, of creatures fed their whole lives on humanoid flesh, and whose hunger is never sated."

Then her eyes swung back to me. "I seek those not afraid to walk

through the portal of darkness that is death, and who will swear to keep fighting when they emerge from the other side. And so a craven like you wastes my time.”

I was ready to say something back, I can tell you. But it was Durnan’s voice I heard instead, warning me to stand down. Didn’t realize till then that my hand was on my sword. But Durnan said that as a patron, even this Red Wizard was his guest, and hearing that, folks around me went back to their conversations and their ale like nothing was amiss.

I haven’t seen her as much after that, though I watch for her. She still comes by the Portal on the busy nights, no one else but me watching where she sits up high, scanning the faces on the taproom floor. Still looking.

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Q&A: Dead in Thay

An Interview with Scott Fitzgerald Gray

Dead in Thay ran during the 2014 Spring D&D Encounters season—back when D&D fifth edition was still in playtesting. The adventure was written by long-time Wizards of the Coast freelance editor and designer Scott Fitzgerald Gray, who describes it as the “proud and ambitious offspring” of D&D Game Day 2013’s *Vault of the Dracolich*. “Mike Shea was the writer, Teos Abadia was developer, and I was editor for that project,” Scott says, “which was a single-session multi-DM setup wherein groups of players were all assaulting a single location at the same time. The adventure was a lot of fun to play, and the multi-table setup worked really well, so Wizards of the Coast decided to try that format on a much larger scale.”

To achieve this larger scale, *Dead in Thay* was conceived and outlined by the Wizards design team as a multiweek, multi-table event for the D&D encounters program. “The overall spec from

WotC was for a site whose builder had been directly inspired by Acererak's Tomb of Horrors, and who had created an even larger homage to that dungeon. Then Szass Tam had taken over the site, repurposing it as a phylactery vault and a breeding ground for a monstrous army."

Featuring an immense and lethal dungeon known as the Doomvault, *Dead in Thay* served as tribute to *Tomb of Horrors*, *Ruins of Undermountain*, and other such "killer dungeons." So what better opportunity with its rerelease as part of *Tales from the Yawning Portal* than to ask its designer for some insights and advice on surviving those dungeons?



The Doomvault (select to view)

Scott says, “I love dungeon crawls in general for the way they can strip the game down to its most basic parameters of exploration and heroism—because ultimately, there’s a reason the game evolved from the baseline of the dungeon as the campaign. As such, I love *Ruins of Undermountain* and *Rappan Athuk* and a ton of other classic megadungeons. I ran the *Temple of Elemental Evil* when it first came out in 1986, then recently ran a kind of reboot version of that original campaign (with two friends of mine who’d also been players in the

original). And I survived the *Tomb of Horrors* as a player (mostly), and have run it with great success a few times, and was lucky enough to have worked on two versions of the tomb for fourth edition D&D, both of which I'm quite proud of.”

Not Just Dangerous, But Killer Dungeons...

“I love killer dungeons in particular because when done right, they become a challenge not just to the characters but to the players. I love puzzles in adventures, and I love mysteries, and whether as a player or DM, those challenge-the-player elements have always been the most fun for me. In the hands of a capricious DM, *Tomb of Horrors* can be a pretty disheartening experience, sure. But as a player, I first went through the *Tomb of Horrors* in 1982 or so, and I thought it was amazing despite the fact that characters died by the truckload—because the challenge wasn’t about how strong or stealthy the characters were. It was about how paranoid and ingenious we could all be as players, and I loved that.”



Kelson Darktreader (select to view)

Of course, they’re called killer dungeons for good reason, and so DMs should be prepared accordingly. “Whenever character death is a pretty sure thing, it’s always good to make sure that there’s enough *raise dead* to go around,” Scott says. “When that’s not possible, a DM should always be thinking about good ways to make use of outside agency. In a scenario in which high-level characters are caught in a TPK, for example, they might be raised and imprisoned by their enemies so

they can be ransomed or interrogated—which then sets up an awesome prison break. Though I had never previously used it myself, the characters-coming-back-as-sort-of-undead thing that *Dead in Thay* does is a really cool take on that sort of ‘stealth resurrection’ idea, which is useful when the characters might not have access to that level of magic themselves.”

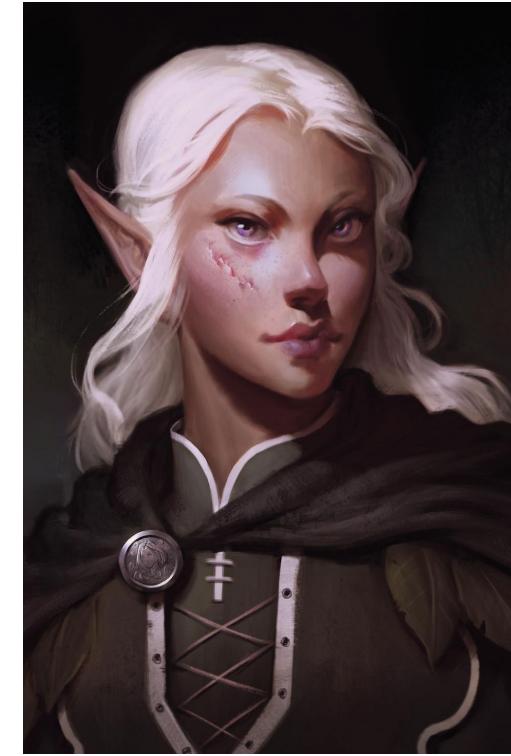
“In terms of general advice for dealing with character death, I think it’s important for a DM to get a sense of how the players are likely to react to it. A lot of players despise *Tomb of Horrors* for its deadly reputation, and I totally understand that. But one of the things many players (especially younger players) sometimes forget is that in the AD&D days, characters were a lot more disposable than they are now. More investment in character creation in the more recent editions of the game creates a much more potent sense of loss when a character dies.

“So if you really want to run *Dead in Thay* or *Tomb of Horrors*, but you’re pretty sure that losing long-term characters is going to sour the experience for the players, don’t be afraid to try it with pregens or one-shot characters. Another alternative is an idea I tripped across while running a megadungeon campaign a couple of years ago, in which every player ran two characters. That way, when individual characters died—and they did—there was a little less sting to it.”

And Not Just Elaborate, But Megadungeons!

In addition to its roots in killer dungeons, *Dead in Thay* also takes inspiration from such megadungeons such as *Ruins of Undermountain*—where for adventuring parties, a two-week vacation abroad can turn into a two-year stint in the Peace Corps. But for *Dead in Thay* specifically, Scott says, resource management is less daunting than in many other dungeons.

“Because the Doomvault is an occupied site, the Red Wizards have plenty of food, water, magic, and whatever else the characters might need for a prolonged



Shalendra Floshin (select to view)

assault. But the presence of all those enemies also makes for a lot more NPC interaction than in many megadungeons, which gives the DM the opportunity to play the NPCs in ways that best fit the players' style. If a group is dedicated to clearing the Doomvault room by room and gathering an awesome collection of red robes while they do, that's cool. But if the players want to instead make use of diplomacy, subterfuge, or psychological warfare, let them go for it.

“The background of the adventure sets up the existence of rebel elements within the Red Wizards, but there are so many different ways that setup might play out that the adventure can't possibly cover them all. Tricking Red Wizards in different zones to fight against each other while the characters just sit back and watch would be great fun, as would be compelling powerful leaders to join the fight against Szass Tam. And given the Doomvault's status as a monstrous breeding ground, players should always be thinking about which monsters are most likely to destroy their Red Wizard masters after being quietly released from captivity.



Thayan apprentice (select to view)

“For handling resource management in megadungeon campaigns in general, I think it's important to watch the players carefully for signs of what might be frustrating them, and to change things up accordingly. Random encounters are a classic example from many dungeon campaigns, because they can really make



Lahnis, Red Wizard (select to view)

things feel like a grind if they make the players and the characters feel like they're being constantly thrown off course or

forced to rest when they don't want to. Simply ignoring rolls for random encounters when the players have an important immediate goal is always a good idea, as is looking for opportunities for the characters to bluff or stealth their way past a potential fight. It can also be fun to use the lowest-threat monsters possible when random encounters are rolled for, so that a quick, easy fight becomes a positive bump on the way toward a goal, rather than a roadblock.

On Handling the Logistics

While resource management within the dungeon is one thing, parties might also be inclined to make several forays into and out of the dungeon.

“One thing that I’ve always tried to do as a DM running a megadungeon campaign is maximize the characters’ freedom of movement, so that it’s always the players’ decision whether to stay in the dungeon to maximize exploration time or to leave at intervals for rest and resupply. Anytime I’ve written a megadungeon of my own, by the time the characters get to the second or third level down, they start to trip across teleportation circles and back doors that they can repurpose to get them out of the dungeon easily, so as to avoid an endless slog to and from the entrance every time.

“This isn’t a spoiler per se, but the Doomvault has a fair amount of teleportation magic in it. So if the

players want the freedom to come and go from the dungeon in ways beyond what's already set down in the adventure, let them figure out a way to make that magic work for them."

And while access points do exist throughout the Doomvault, there are also travel restrictions through glyphs and magical gates—which hark back to the key cards from another classic adventure,

Expedition to the Barrier Peaks'.

"That was definitely an inspiration, and I've used that magic keys trope any number of times in my own adventures since I first played *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*. Whenever there's a dungeon constructed with an eye to defensive measures—an occupied complex, an abandoned fortress whose magical defenses are still intact, and so on—I think it's a reasonable assumption that a group bent on looting the place shouldn't just be able to freely walk around. The trick is to make sure that such limitations on movement don't seem arbitrary (harking back to the note above about watching for player frustration).



Phaia, Red Wizard necromancer (select to view)



"Because the gates in the Doomvault were specifically designed to accommodate the multi-table play that the adventure was originally designed for, a DM running the revised version has a lot more latitude in dealing with those barriers—and more opportunity to downplay or ignore them if they get in the way of what the players and characters are trying to do."

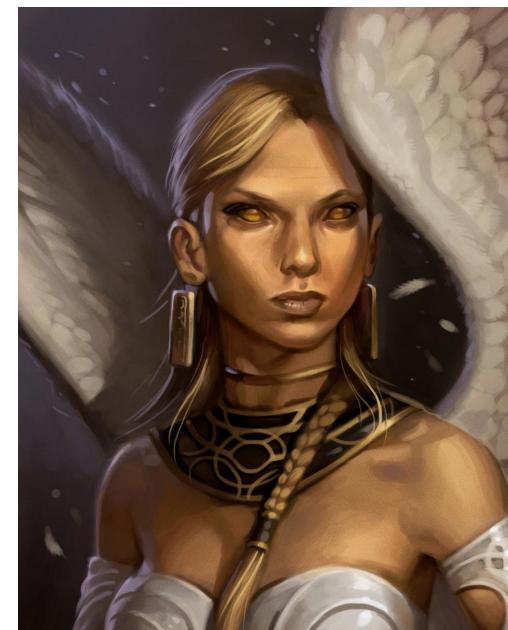
[Pencheska, succubus \(select to view\)](#)

That multi-table play is what set *Dead in Thay* apart from the D&D

Encounters program's previously more episodic play style. For instance, there was the role of event coordinator to manage different groups going through the dungeon separately but concurrently.

"Dead in Thay had a specifically metagame mechanical conceit in the division of the Doomvault into different zones that were clearly delineated and difficult to move between. This ensured that each DM and player group could focus on one zone at a time without worrying about running into each other unless they wanted to. So the event coordinator was essentially an overseer DM, keeping track of what was going on in different zones and at different tables, and then figuring out when events engineered by different groups of players would spill out into the play of other groups week by week. That included things like tracking the dungeon's alert level, which determined the frequency and severity of random encounters as the Red Wizards ramped up their response to the incursion.

“With the updated version of *Dead in Thay* being set up as a single-party scenario, the coordinator’s tasks from the original adventure have become the responsibility of the DM. But I think it would be a very cool experience to have a number of different DMs join forces to run groups through the dungeon at the same time. Even with groups playing in different locations, those DMs could work together in between sessions to compare notes, adjust the alert level, and decide which zones their groups should take on week by week, like a kind of group coordinator. (If anyone tries that kind of setup with the revised adventure, I’d love to hear about it.)”



[Lumalia, deva \(select to view\)](#)

A Few Final Thoughts

Finally, for adventurers looking to gather some rumors and legends about the Doomvault (perhaps over a few pints at the Yawning Portal)?

“The spoiler risk notwithstanding, the size and scope of the adventure means there are literally too many awesomely nasty choices to narrow down. I can say, though, that someone who’s survived the Doomvault might mention a number of sections where secret doors have been arranged in fiendishly confounding ways. They might mention having been able to forge unexpected alliances with the most unlikely monsters, finding common ground in the hatred of the Red Wizards who’ve imprisoned them. They might mention that the Forest of Death, the Lake of Madness, and the Temples of Despair are not misnamed. They might give a strange warning to watch out for pigs.”

“Oh, and they’ll probably also offer up the general advice that any sane adventurer should stay away from the Doomvault at all costs. But where’s the fun in that?”

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Margin-top for phone of text]

Scott Fitzgerald Gray (9th-level layabout, vindictive neutral) is a writer of fantasy and speculative fiction, a fiction editor, a story editor, and an editor and designer of roleplaying games—all of which means he finally has the job he really wanted when he was sixteen. Since 2004, Scott has worked on upwards of two hundred RPG rulebooks, supplements, adventures, and articles for Wizards of the Coast and other publishers, including all three core rulebooks for fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons. He shares his life in the Canadian hinterland with a schoolteacher, two itinerant daughters, and a large number of animal companions.

More info on Scott and his work (some of it even occasionally truthful) can be found by reading between the lines at insaneangel.com, where he talked a few years ago about **fun times in the Tomb of Horrors**.

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Fiction: Against the Giants

By Bart Carroll

Various charms hung everywhere from the tiefling, tied around his wrists, his neck, and even one of his horns—small leather pouches filled with tokens, written prayers, the first coins he'd ever stolen. Like Garret's stories, many of these charms were purposely false. Mere gaudy trinkets, meant to disguise the few true and potent relics.

"Pay up from last time or get out," Durnan growled as the tiefling entered the tavern.

Garret held up his hands in acquiescence, slowly bringing them to one of the tiny pouches tied within his hair. *How did the barkeep remember all his customers' debts?* the tiefling wondered. *Some charm of his own, possibly . . .*

Durnan likewise reached below the counter to some weapon stored

there. On previous occasions, Garret had “accidentally” set off various items when asked to settle up—bags of tricks, iron flasks—then escaped in the commotion.

This time, though, Garret pulled out a gold coin and slid it across the bar. “Paid in full.”

The barkeep accepted the payment with disdain, the coin still covered in loose hairs.

“So, how did you fare against the giants?” The query came from one of the tavern regulars—Georgie Two Shoes, not yet too deep in his cups. All the regulars remembered when the tiefling had pledged to retake the hill giants’ steading, setting out with Chief Nosnra’s son, Ocras, in tow.

“Sadly, the steading remains in the iron grip of Captain Steeplejack,” Garret replied, referring to the expedition leader who had defeated Nosnra’s giants years before. “However, we did find a map there leading to an even greater fortress.”

Garret produced a fragment of map from some interior pocket, evidence for the tale he was about to spin. “The journey was treacherous enough, to a remote glacial rift.” It was well known that Steeplejack’s former company had continued their campaign from the steading to such a site, moving against a clan of frost giants and their jarl. “We followed their route, myself and Ocras, surviving along the way on elk, and then caribou, and then polar bear, but eventually even those grew sparse.

“When we finally arrived, we nearly perished right at the edge of the rift. Our trail collapsed, plunging us down to the base. But praise Levistus!” Here, the tiefling winked, as he often did when invoking the names of fiendish entities to provoke the Yawning Portal’s more righteous patrons. “We managed to find shelter within a snow-covered dome of ice—the old lair of a remorhaz. Still, we would have frozen and joined the bones of its past victims . . . except, hidden among those bones, I found this!”

With a flourish, the tiefling held aloft a plain metal ring.

“Hmm,” Georgie mused. “Ring of warmth, I suppose?”

“Far better. A ring of three wishes. As I said, we would have perished that very night, except for our first wish: for comfort even there in the rift. And so we found ourselves magically transported to a visitors’ cave, hidden deep within the rift and warmed by underground volcanics. Steeplejack’s company had camped there as well—we found remnants of their old supplies, though no sign of the heroes themselves.

“But however warm and well provisioned, we could not remain there forever. Nor did we wish to risk further exposure in the rift searching for its treasures. And so, for our second wish: to find where the frost giants’ jarl had kept his wealth. Once more, we found ourselves transported. This time, to the jarl’s private cavern where his chests, trunks, and coffers were kept. Alas, I only realized then how poorly I’d worded my wish. Great wealth had indeed been kept there in the past, but Steeplejack’s company had already been through—the frost giants defeated, and the jarl’s treasure looted!”

From more than one patron came quiet laughter that held little sense of surprise. Garret continued on regardless.

“However, if my wish was poorly worded, Ocras’s was worse by far. Before I could stop him, the hill giant placed his hand over the ring and bellowed: “Enough of this skulking! I wish to rule! Bring me to the throne!”

“Not sure rings work that way . . .” Georgie muttered, but Garret ignored him.

“And so he was transported away. As for myself, searching for an escape, I eventually wandered through the jarl’s audience alcove. And there on the throne sat Ocras, frozen to its surface, his body covered over in ice. I could see his eyes still very much alive, however, looking about from within that rime. But at least he would get his wish—to rule this icy stronghold for his own. There on the throne, he would remain.”

“If he was still alive, you didn’t try and melt him out?” Georgie asked aloud.

“It was his wish! Who was I to contravene? Besides, I needed all the kindling I could find to survive my own journey back.”

“So if you didn’t find treasure there either,” Georgie asked, “whence came that gold coin? Here I always thought you couldn’t even lift anything heavier than silver.”

“True, it didn’t come from the glacial rift. But rather, from the stronghold of the third giants I faced, the hall of the fire giant king. But that’s a tale for another time. One that involved the Mighty Servant of Leuk-o, that I used to walk the hall’s fiery corridors. And where I finally came about the rest of Steeplejack’s old crew!”

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Art: Against the Giants

The three linked adventures that make up *Against the Giants* were originally released in 1978, during the time when Gary Gygax was still writing the *Player's Handbook* for the original AD&D game. As some of the oldest adventures ever published for D&D, *The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*, *The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl*, and *Hall of the Fire Giant King* continue to hold a special place in the hearts and memories of players of all ages.

Even as the mechanics of these adventures have been updated to fifth edition for *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, so too has their art evolved. Here, senior art director Kate Irwin provides an inside look at the latest incarnations of Chief Nosnra, Jarl Grugnur, and King Snurre Iron Belly!

The art process for any D&D book typically involves having concepting artists (including the D&D team's own Richard Whitters and Shawn Wood) create a series of concept pieces for reference, as

well as the creation of an art order. Because *Tales from the Yawning Portal* features revised adventures for which interior art already existed, some art orders for the book referenced this earlier art. In other cases, as with the art for *Against the Giants*, the art orders created the specifications for original illustrations, helping to bring those classic adventures to life for a new generation of players.

An art order is a descriptive document whose final details are reviewed by Kate Irwin before it's sent off to the artist commissioned to create the illustration. This issue's *White Plume Mountain* article talks to Claudio Pozas about the work he did on that adventure. For *Against the Giants*, Kate worked with the talented and versatile fantasy artist **Mark Behm**.

Here are some of the art orders for *Against the Giants*, along with the progression of the art from sketch to final piece.



From left to right: Grugnur, Nosnra and Snurre (select to view)

The THREE GIANT LEADERS stand side by side against a background of forest wilderness (nothing climate specific). They look out at the viewer with threatening expressions on their faces. Overhead, the sky is filled with dark, lightning-streaked clouds.

Grugnur, the FROST GIANT JARL, is on the left. He wears CHAIN MAIL and a HORNED HELMET, carries a SHIELD, and holds a LONGSWORD in his right hand as though he's about to swing it. His hair and beard are both long and white, and his skin has a bluish tinge. He stands 21 feet tall.

Nosnra, the HILL GIANT CHIEF, is in the center. He wears a ragged LOINCLOTH and crude boots. He holds a small BALLISTA (which he uses as a crossbow) over his head with both hands. He stands 16 feet tall, somewhat shorter than the other two giants.

Snurre, the FIRE GIANT KING, is on the right. His body is hugely muscled and extraordinarily ugly—very broad, with bandy legs. His teeth are tusk-like and protruding, and his sidewhiskers and beard are bright orange and full. He wears PLATE ARMOR and a HELMET, both made of BLACK IRON, and holds a huge GREATSWORD before him in both hands. Beneath the helmet, his head is bald. A gem-encrusted belt circles his waist, and draped over his shoulders is a cloak made of white dragon hide. He stands 19 feet tall, slightly taller than an ordinary fire giant.

In the dark sky looming over the giants, we can see the form of a FACE IN THE CLOUDS. This is the visage of Eclavdra, a DROW priestess, seen in extreme close-up as she looks down on the giants. Her expression is sinister, with a slight smile of satisfaction and superiority. She is the power behind the scenes who has brought the giants together. Eclavdra is a regal-looking drow with black skin and flowing white hair.

As you look at the various progressions from sketch to final art, you might notice Grugnur and Snurre swapping places. As Kate notes, some artists have a right- or left-handed tendency in their composition, and flipping the image checks to make sure it has a good general sense of balance. Doing so also provides slightly different versions to choose from, and in this case, the image had a better feel with Snurre on the left.





Giants: Great Hall



(select to view)

It's FEASTING time for the hill giants. Nosnra, the HILL GIANT CHIEF is seated at the center of a crude wooden table that stands close to one of the walls in the hall.

The table is heaped with food that only a hill giant could appreciate (cooked and raw hunks of animals, and so on). It's sometimes difficult to tell the uneaten food from leftover bone and sinew. Nosnra should be recognizable as the same hill giant from the chapter opener illo. He is gorging himself. His belly, covered with bits that didn't make it to his mouth, protrudes over the edge of the table.

Seated to either side of Nosnra are his wife and one of his subchiefs, with others beyond them (all of them also HILL GIANTS). We should see enough to get across the idea that Nosnra isn't the only one stuffing himself. The other giants are not quite as large as Nosnra. On the wall behind Nosnra is hung the small BALLISTA that he uses as a crossbow (as seen in the chapter opener). Supported by hooks on either side of the ballista are CRUDE SPEARS (six in total) that Nosnra uses for crossbow bolts.

You'll notice certain words capitalized in the art orders. Much like the names and visual details capitalized in a screenplay, these represent important details that are called out for the artist to take note of. Kate isn't sure who started this practice for D&D art orders, but suspects it might have been none other than Chris Perkins.



Giants: Trophy Hall:



Grugnur, the FROST GIANT JARL, is relaxing in his trophy hall. Grugnur should be recognizable as the same frost giant from the chapter opener—but in this image, he is not holding his weapon and shield and not wearing his helmet. He is seated in a rough-hewn WOODEN CHAIR, gazing out with admiration at the trophies mounted on the wall nearby.

We should be able to see as much of the wall as possible, because it's loaded with stuff:

- The head of a giant stag
- The mandibles and claws of an umber hulk

- A giant boar's head
- The skull of a dwarf, wearing an iron crown
- The wings of a giant eagle

Between and around these trophies, locate some miscellaneous weapons and shields. The wall should have no large blank areas, suggesting that this collection extends beyond the image and is much larger than the snapshot we can see.

For complex images, artists will sometimes supply a number of sketches along the way, providing choices that are then finalized. In this case, Jarl Grugnur was given two poses, including a more casual setup that showed him relaxed with his feet propped against his trophy wall. Kate preferred the pose featuring a proud and thoughtful Grugnur facing away.



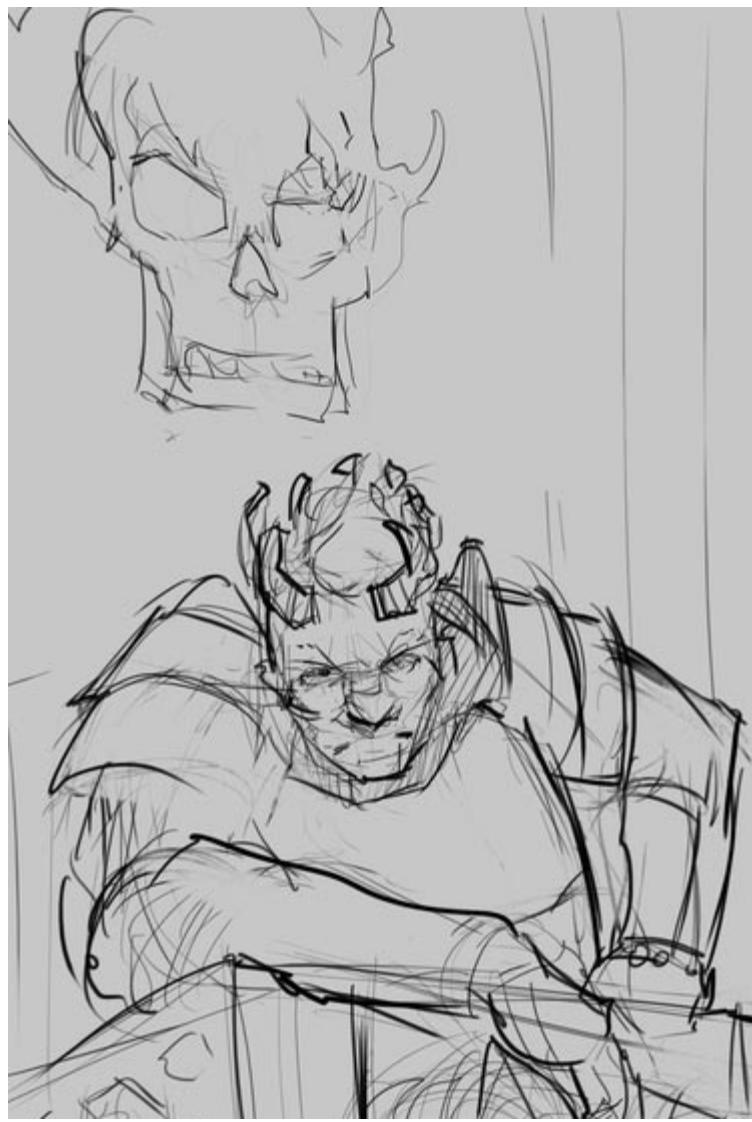
Giants: Throne Room

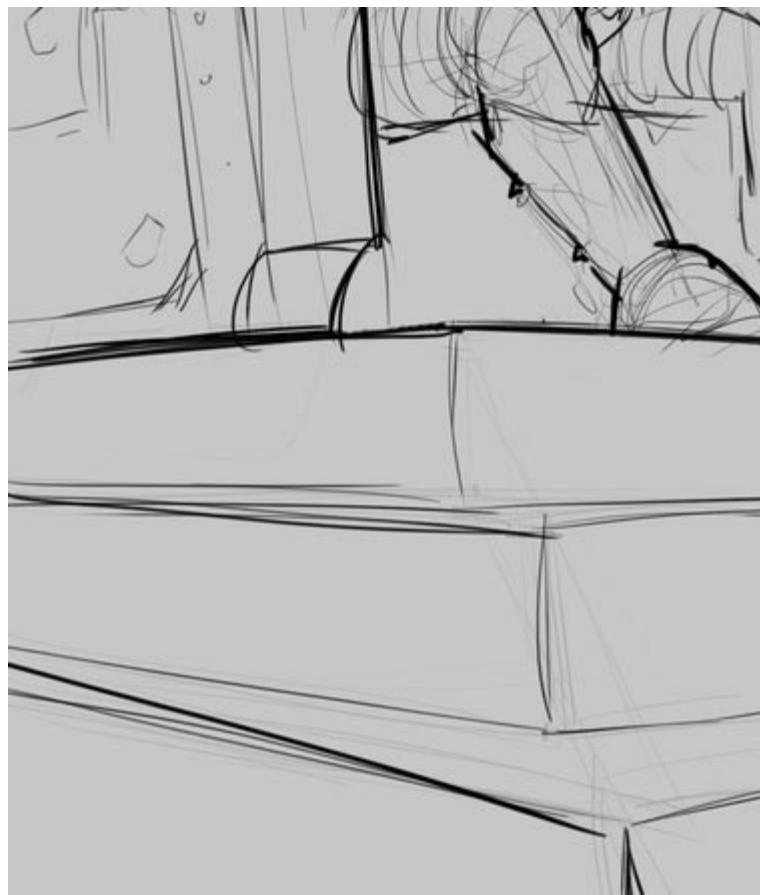
Snurre, the FIRE GIANT KING, is holding court in his throne room. Snurre should be recognizable as the same fire giant from the chapter opener—but in this image he is not wearing his helmet and is not holding his sword. He is seated on his THRONE, made of BLACK ONYX with bands of white running through it. It is decorated with

several RED GEMS that are set into the back of the throne and also the outer surfaces of its arms.

Snurre is looking down, literally and figuratively, as though the viewer were kneeling before him. His expression is FEAR SOME, but he is not in a rage. Instead of his helmet, Snurre wears his IRON CROWN. It is decorated with a single large orange gemstone in the front center, along with smaller rubies and diamonds along its edges. Behind the throne at the top of the image, we can see part of the image of a flaming skull, formed out of colored stones set into the wall.

As with Jarl Grugnur, two poses in sketch form provide options for King Snurre. In one, he slouches back in his throne, untroubled by any concern the adventurers might pose. However, Kate preferred the body language of Snurre leaning forward, aggressively looking down on a puny adventuring party.





Maps and Cartoons

To celebrate the rerelease of *Against the Giants* as part of *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, this issue of *Dragon+* includes downloadable maps for those classic giant adventures. Our thanks to cartographer Robert Lazzaretti, whose work you can see more of at <http://lazzmap.tumblr.com>.



(select to view)

(High-res version [here](#))



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The **fiction intro** for *Against the Giants* references the original short story “Return to the Steading” from *Dragon+* 11, featuring Garret the tiefling’s foray into the famed hill giant fortress. In that tale, the name of Chief Nosnra’s son, Ocras, was taken from the Irish word for

“hunger.”.\

For readers familiar with the adventure, Garret and Ocras entered the steading through the front gate and foyer (area 1), meeting Captain Steeplejack in the great hall (area 11) before escaping through the kitchen (area 17) to the dungeon level. There, they entered the marshaling area (area 1) and traversed the secret room on their way to the chief’s secret treasure room (areas 32 and 33)—at least until thwarted by a pit trap. The undead manticore that inadvertently saved the pair emerged from area 30.

Through the years, Jason Thompson has crafted walkthrough maps for each of the classic giant adventures, with *The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief* and *The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl* showcased on the D&D website, and *Hall of the Fire Giant King* featured in *Dragon+ 9*. For your enjoyment, we revisit those classic walkthrough maps in this issue, but be warned—spoilers abound!

[The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief \(Part One\)](#)

[The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief \(Part Two\)](#)

[The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl](#)

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Fiction: Tomb of Horrors

By Bart Carroll

Nibs sat in the corner of the Yawning Portal, sketching illustrations to accompany his tale. Nearly everyone had a tale to tell in the Portal, the gnome bard had found. But the act of sketching them out tended to draw an audience closer—and whether they paid for the privilege of hearing his tales, he could often at least sell the sketches for coin when he was done.

“There once was a crafter who specialized in miniature models of manors, villas, and even the occasional stronghold. Wealthy clients would commission these models to then take to their builders.”

From the first sketch the gnome drew: Wealthy merchants, eyes wide in appreciation, surround one such model: a rich villa fabricated down to the most exacting detail, including elaborate miniature furniture for the buyers to shift and move around,

experimenting with potential layouts to their hearts' content.

“The crafter also made models of the city—its many blocks and streets—to sell to the militia in order for them to better plan their tactics and raids.”

Sketch: *Same scene as above, but the merchants are replaced by watch commanders. They surround a model street populated with miniature versions of themselves and their soldiers. They appear to be using an intricate set of rules for their practice exercises, and wagering high stakes against one another.*

“Copies of the models were sometimes given by the crafter to orphaned children as playthings. But many more of those copies were sold to thieves’ guilds, and used to more perfectly plan break-ins and thefts.”

Sketch: *As before, but with watch commanders replaced by thieves. They look at the earlier model villa, not only now featuring the safes and chests holding the owner’s wealth, but also miniature versions of the locks and safeguards protecting that wealth.*

“However, the crafter’s masterpiece was not from anywhere within the city itself. Instead, he long ago began to assemble a model based on all the rumors surrounding the legendary tomb of Acererak the demilich. These rumors he gathered from anyone who had ever claimed to possess such knowledge. But knowing how little of that knowledge was likely true, the crafter further consulted through spells that allowed him to speak with the dead and learn legends and lore. Anything that might provide another scrap, another mote of detail, that he could put into his model.

“Everything he learned over the years went into this great project, worked on completely in secret. It might never have been meant for public display, in fact, perhaps intended only for his own use when finally complete. To run through Acererak’s tomb on his own. Only one day, the crafter disappeared. His clients searched everywhere, eventually finding the model tomb in a secret back room in his shop.”

Sketch: *Still the same view as above, only here with a group composed of merchants, watch commanders, and thieves. They surround a new model, marveling at its intricacy and sense of detail*

—hallways filled with deadly traps, hidden doors, and even a tiny, rolling juggernaut.

And there, at the bottom of one of the model’s pit traps, lies the miniature body of the crafter.

“It seemed that the crafter’s skill came in part from potions and spells of diminution, used to shrink down to the models’ scale and work within them. No one had ever suspected this before. Only here, crafting one of the tomb’s traps, he fell in and perished.”

“Impossible!” one of the nearby patrons called out in response to the gnome bard’s tale. “A spell cast over him would end at his death. A potion would wear off eventually.”

“Yes, all normally true. Except it was also thought that crafting the model had connected it somehow to forces within the real tomb. Perhaps knowledge of the model’s mere existence touched Acererak as he slept—who then reached out to spring the trap that felled the crafter, and further kept his body in a permanently diminished state.

“But who can say? All that is known is that the crafter was buried, fittingly enough, within his model tomb.”

Sketch: *The crafter entombed, his body prepared in place of Acererak’s. His tiny skull is set with flecks of gemstone in the eye sockets and teeth.*

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Behind the Screens: Tomb of Horrors

Dressing the Tomb, with Creighton Broadhurst

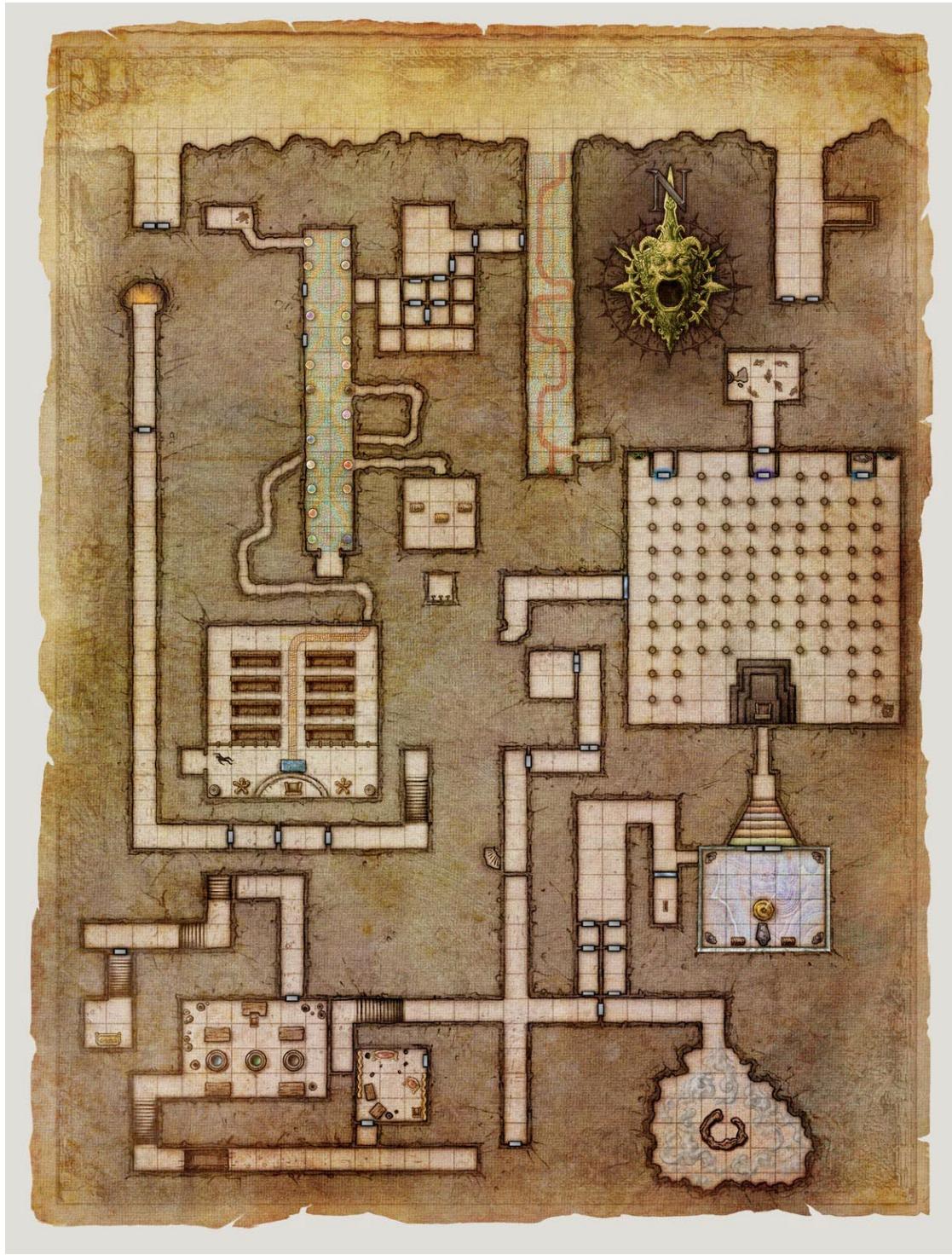
One of the most famed (and feared) adventures in D&D's storied history, *Tomb of Horrors* is an old-school classic. Written by Gary Gygax specifically to test the highest-level characters and most cunning players in his Greyhawk campaign, the adventure is probably responsible for more death and suffering than any other.

Countless adventurers have fallen



to the tomb's devious, sadistic traps. And the vast majority of those who survive that fate are destroyed in the end by the tomb's fell master—the demilich Acererak. As such, when your group's characters brave the tomb, they won't be the first to tread its horrid depths. And unless they're extremely lucky, they won't be the last.

(Select to view)



(Select to view)

high-res, or hi-res annotated versions

During their delve, the characters will discover signs of previous failed expeditions. Discarded equipment, graffiti, and even the moldering bodies of the fallen all litter the tomb. A wise DM judiciously uses such features to add depth and verisimilitude to the party's explorations, and to enhance the tomb's atmosphere of fear.

and paranoia. Alternatively, features might be presented to reward careful (or desperate) characters with useful resources or clues. For example, the niche (item 5 under “Eight Pieces of Unobvious Dungeon Dressing,” below) might contain a helpful item stashed by a long-dead explorer. The brilliant wall colors (item 3 under “Eight Pieces of Well-Hidden Dungeon Dressing”) might point toward a secret door.



(Select to view)

Placing Dungeon Dressing

The tables below present minor pieces of dungeon dressing that characters might notice as they explore the tomb. Most features can be spotted either with passive Wisdom (Perception) or by actively searching an area. Several entries present an obvious piece of dressing with further details in parentheses. For those entries, only provide the parenthetical information if a successful search of the feature has been made.

As multiple generations of DMs have done before you, you need to make the Tomb of Horrors your own. Use, modify, or ignore the dungeon dressing here as you see fit. Remember, the play’s the thing, and even when you’re slaughtering or tormenting their characters, your players should be having fun!



(Select to view)

Eight Pieces of Obvious Dungeon Dressing

With a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 10 or higher, or a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character might notice one of the following items of interest.

1. Scrawled graffiti in faded white chalk decorates the floor. It reads, “Not this way.”
2. A smeared smudge of charcoal on the floor shows where someone stubbed out a torch.
3. A faint grinding sound reverberates through the tomb. Dust sifts down from the ceiling for a few moments. The sound quickly fades away.
4. The remains of a large leather-bound book are seen on the floor among other trash. The book is titled *The Spellbook and Adventures of Fonkin Hoddypeak*, but naught but its burnt, flaking cover survives. Based on the burn pattern, the fire seems to have started inside the book.
5. The skeletal remains of a human sit slumped against a wall. The body wears only moldering clothes, with signs that previous explorers picked it clean of anything valuable. (A search of the body notes the shard of a wickedly curved rusty iron spike thrust up through the unfortunate adventurer’s left foot.)

6. The musty smell of death and decay hangs in the air. The smell is slightly stronger near several small cracks in one wall.
7. The skeletal remains of at least a half-dozen powerfully built humanoids lie scattered about, surrounded by the moldering and rusting remains of their equipment. (With a search, the skeletons can be identified as orcs.)
8. The faint sound of far-off music and joyful singing reaches the characters' ears.



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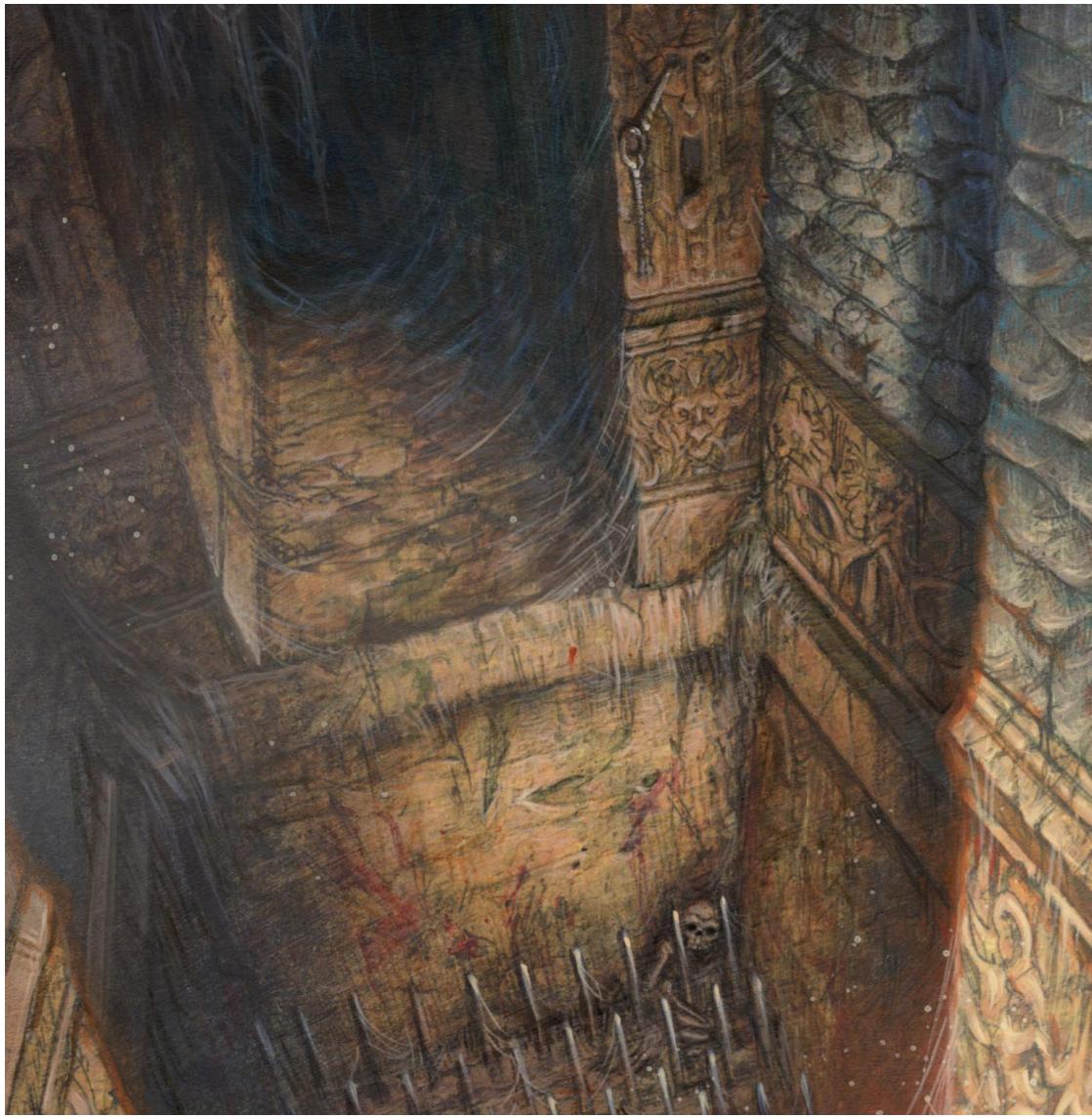
Eight Pieces of Unobvious Dungeon Dressing

With a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher, or a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character might notice one of the following items of interest.

1. Frescoes on the wall depict scenes of normal life—folk in commoners' garb going about their business. (A search of the frescoes notes that several of the figures have worms emerging from their eyes.)
2. Wisps of dusty cobweb cover the ceiling. (A search of the cobwebs notes that they are unusually heavy with dust, though they remain

extremely sticky and impervious to nonmagical fire.)

3. Faintly scratched into a wall about two feet above the floor are the words, “Robilar was here.”
4. A faint breeze disturbs the air, emanating from two dozen tiny holes drilled into the ceiling.
5. The mortar around one of the bricks in a wall is in bad repair. The brick can be removed to reveal an empty niche beyond.
6. Thick dust covers a sling hanging from a brick protruding from one wall. The sling is in surprisingly good condition.
7. Fragments of melted bone litter the floor. (A search of the bones notes that they bear a green tinge.)
8. A scrap of bloody, ripped parchment lies on the floor, shrouded in dust. A hasty scrawl upon it issues the warning, “Beware its eyes...”



Eight Pieces of Well-Hidden Dungeon Dressing

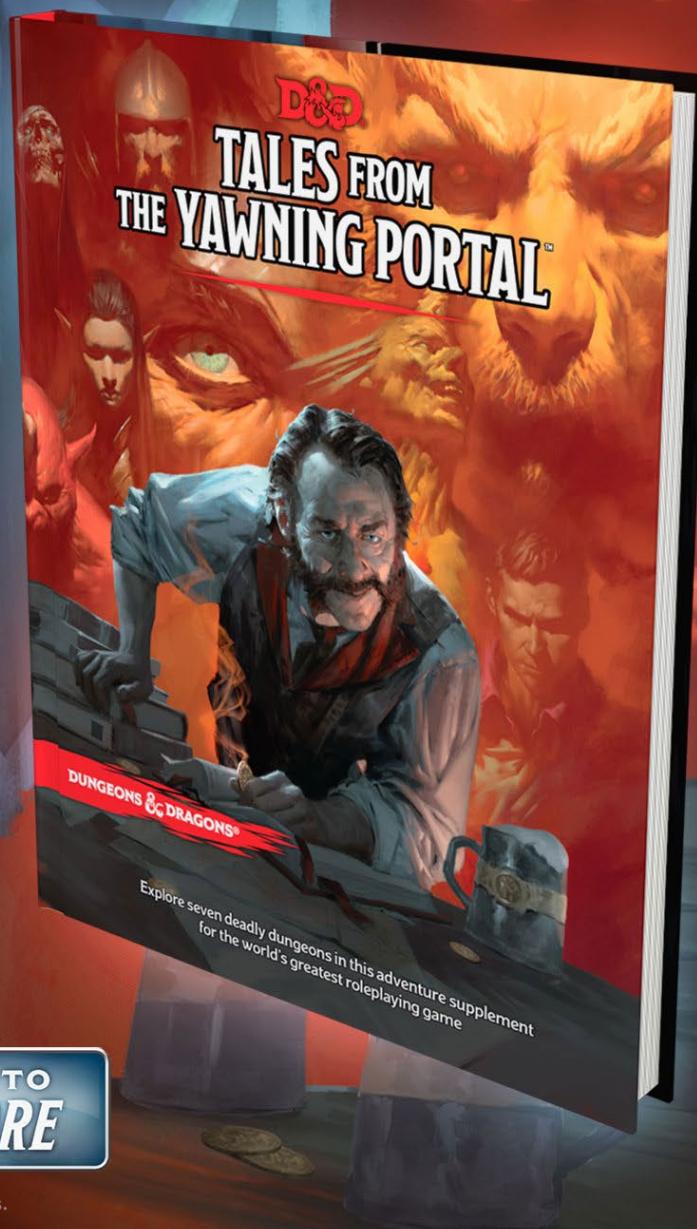
With a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 20 or higher, or a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character might notice one of the following items of interest.

1. A leering devil-face mosaic decorates the floor, much of it obscured by thick dust. (A search of the area reveals faint tracks in the dust, indicating that previous explorers gave the mosaic a wide berth.)
2. One of the flagstones in the floor is cracked and slightly lower than the stones around it. (A search of the flagstone notes several tiny dust-choked holes bored into it. Below the flagstone, a small niche holds a cracked, empty vial.)
3. Splotches of bright, brilliant color decorate the wall. (A search of the wall notes a small patch at the center of the area that seems faded and worn, as if repeatedly touched or rubbed.)
4. Dried spatters of blood mark out a twisting pattern across the floor. After a short distance, the pattern vanishes abruptly, as if the creature that was bleeding disappeared.
5. One of the shadows cast by the party's lights suddenly takes on the form of a horned humanoid reaching out its hand toward an unsuspecting character.
6. The glint of metal in the party's light reveals a jagged dagger tip wedged between two flagstones.
7. A small slot has been scratched into the wall. (A search of the wall notes what appears to be the faint carving of a coin, or perhaps a ring, along with an arrow pointing from the circle to the slot—a clue as to how to operate the concealed exit in the tomb's chapel of evil.)
8. A lurid fresco of a grinning skull with red glowing eyes and sparkling teeth decorates one wall. Scrawled below it in chalk are the words, "Beware the two keys, for they bring great wealth and great danger." (A search of the fresco reveals the tiny, wispy image of a writhing humanoid within each of the skull's eyes.)

Creighton Broadhurst releases fifth edition compatible GM's resources through his company, [Raging Swan Press](#). An ENnie Award-winning designer of *Madness at Gardmore Abbey*, Creighton loves running games but hates prepping for them! He's a fan of old-school gaming and making things as simple as possible (but not too simple) for the DM. You can read his thoughts on game design at creightonbroadhurst.com.

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DELVE INTO D&D HISTORY



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Tormented Souls

Beamdog producer Phillip Daigle on the making of *Planescape: Torment: Enhanced Edition*.

Planescape: Torment is widely regarded as not only one of the best D&D computer games ever, but one of the greatest computer roleplaying games (CRPGs) of all time. The winner of multiple game-of-the-year awards for its 1999 release, Planescape: Torment has more recently become one of the most eagerly fan-requested candidates for a remake—a clamor that has been growing steadily ever since developer Beamdog began releasing enhanced editions of classic D&D titles such as [Baldur's Gate](#) and [Icewind Dale](#). With the release of [Planescape: Torment: Enhanced Edition](#) for PC, Mac, Linux, iOS, and Android, we talked with Beamdog producer Phillip Daigle to learn more about the reforging of a CRPG classic.



Phillip Daigle

Daigle acknowledges how acutely Beamdog felt the pressure of both fans' expectations and its own lofty standards as the Planescape: Torment project unfolded. "Every single meeting we had regarding Planescape: Torment was around that exact topic. 'Is this Planescape as we remember it? Is what I remember being presented in the best possible way?' We faced unique challenges because we're competing with nostalgia, and not just what the game was actually like. Ensuring that we're not only meeting but exceeding that sense of nostalgia is very important to us."

But why is the original Planescape: Torment still so highly revered nearly eighteen years on from its release? Well, for those unfortunate enough to have missed it the first time around—or who are simply too young to have played it—the first thing to note was that the game was most definitely not standard fantasy fare. Planescape: Torment took place in the Planescape campaign setting—a nexus of planar realities that intersect the D&D multiverse—and was chock

full of bizarre, interesting, and unusual characters and locations. Demons sat at dive bars nursing their beers, intelligent city streets pleaded with you for aid, and the setting was a place where reality was largely dictated by faith.



The Nameless One (select to view)



(Select to view)

Just as importantly, narrative exploration rather than combat was the focus of Planescape: Torment, whose central hero wasn't exactly cast

in the classic heroic mold. Players of the game took on the role of the Nameless One, a scarred corpse who woke up on a cold mortuary slab without a clue as to who he was or why he was there. He was soon joined by a floating, wisecracking skull named Morte and a host of other curious companions—including a chaste succubus and a pyromaniac mage—who simply defied conventional expectations. As a player, your mission was to find out who you were, how you died, and why you couldn't remember any of it. Planescape: Torment's mix of the supremely inventive and the downright bizarre broke new ground in game design, and ultimately defined one of the most memorable RPG narratives ever conceived for a computer game.



(Select to view)

“Planescape: Torment specifically tried to invert or defy many common RPG tropes of the time,” says Daigle. “Games of that era were very commonly focused on big goals: save the world, save the galaxy, and such like. The design strategy in Planescape: Torment was quite unique: build a game that was all about being selfish. A story that revolves around the player as a person, not their role in the universe.”

Although Planescape: Torment was built on the highly successful Infinity Engine used for Baldur’s Gate, it also improved on that engine in many ways. What made the game stand out the first time around was a singular accident of time, place, and the team of highly talented individuals at Black Isle Studios who made it. “It was a combination of [original director] Chris Avellone’s excellent writing,

a moody and unique soundtrack by Mark Morgan and Richard Band, and an intensely unique setting,” says Daigle. “All these things combined to create something unforgettable.”

Despite the success of the Baldur’s Gate and Icewind Dale enhanced editions, Beamdog had set itself a daunting task in remaking such a revered title. With all the advantages of modern technology and techniques, was it ever tempting to try and improve on the ‘perfection’ of the original? “Absolutely,” says Daigle. “But that was tempered by our experience with previous enhanced editions, and by the fact that Chris Avellone wanted to stay true to the original. Our stance with Planescape: Torment: Enhanced Edition was to curate, not to add or remove any content.”



(Select to view)



(Select to view)

Every decision Beamdog made kept the intent of the original designers firmly in mind, and was ultimately measured by how it would affect the game's overall atmosphere. "I think we've achieved a fair balance," says Daigle, "offering convenience without altering the core experience." Recreating that experience meant implementing all the changes made by the game's version 1.1 patch, as the original code has long since been lost. The new enhanced edition also incorporates or reconstructs many of the fan-made mods and fixes that were produced post release, which made Planescape: Torment one of the most heavily fan-modded titles of all time. "We incorporated or reconstructed several popular fixpacks," says Daigle, "and we also learned some pretty big lessons with our last release, the Siege of Dragonspear expansion pack for Baldur's Gate."

Even as Beamdog set out to produce a version of the game that would remain true to the original, that game needed to be played on the improved devices that modern gamers demand. The PC version was reasonably straightforward, following on from the work done on Beamdog's previous enhanced titles. The spell system in the new enhanced edition was a major



Torment Tattoo (select to view)

undertaking, though, involving the painstaking rebuilding of many of the game's spells and special abilities.

Shaping the game to work on modern tablets was an equally daunting task. “The user interface was the biggest challenge, but it was also the most satisfying to resolve. On tablets, we’ve diverged quite significantly from desktops, and we’ve spent a lot of time making sure that the game scales well on devices of all shapes and sizes.” The design team encountered only one really significant issue—that of “pixel hunting,” or dragging the mouse around an area to hunt for clues in the environment. “Tablets obviously don’t have cursors, so we had to ensure that any puzzles that rely on that concept were still playable.”

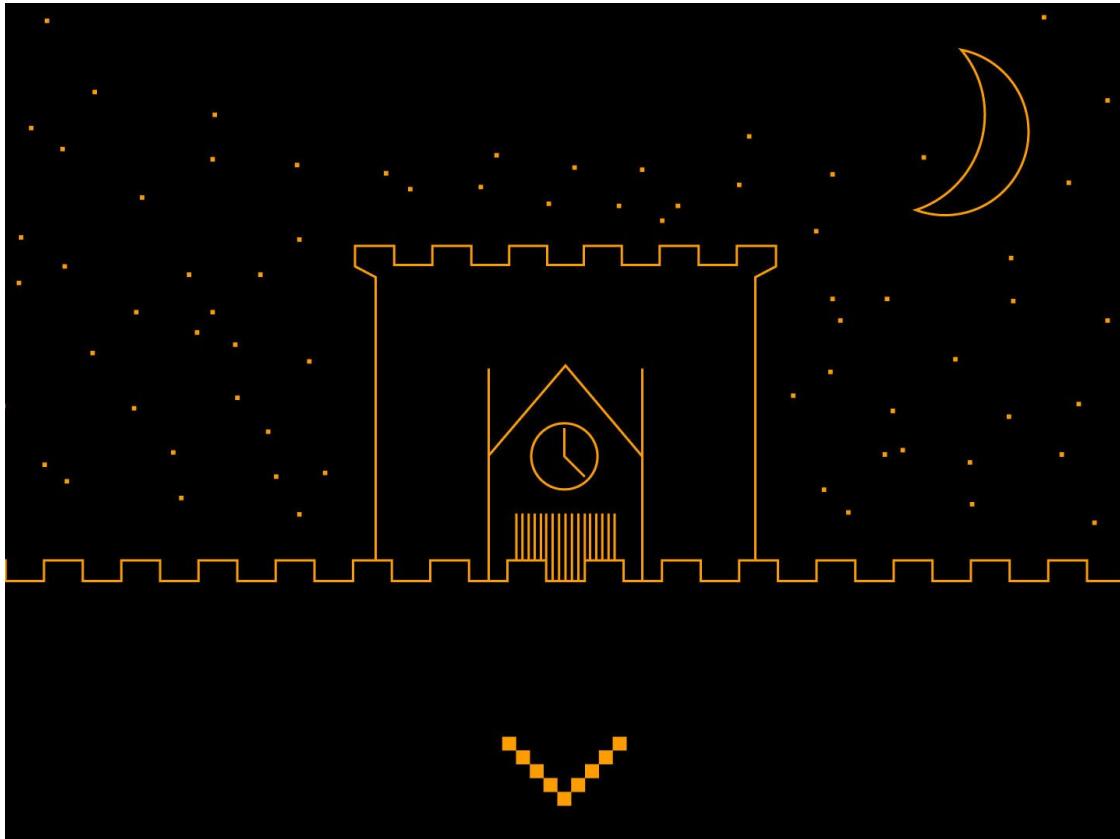
But perhaps Beamdog’s most significant accomplishment for the enhanced edition was tuning a nearly-two-decades-old game for modern high-definition displays. “We had to ensure that we knocked the all-new high-resolution display out of the park, and the game looks and plays truly spectacularly at 4K. I’m glad we took the time that we did to get it absolutely right.”

If one thing comes through when Daigle talks about the overall experience of updating Planescape: Torment, it’s the sheer passion and meticulous attention to detail that Beamdog has put into this remake. Everyone involved hopes that modern audiences will fall in love all over again with this enhanced edition—or, for those lucky enough to come to it with fresh eyes, discover one of the most

intriguing and influential CRPGs ever made. “We spent a lot of time doing side-by-side playthroughs with the original game on one monitor and the enhanced edition on another, to ensure that everything functioned the way it did in the originals,” says Daigle. “It plays exactly the same, but just looks a whole lot better.”

To find out more about Beamdog’s enhanced editions of classic D&D games, take a look at [Baldur’s Gate](#), [Baldur’s Gate II](#), [Icewind Dale](#), and now [Planescape: Torment](#) at the Beamdog website.

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A Modest History of the Desktop Dungeon

Listen carefully, and in certain dark corners of the Internet you'll hear the sound of much rejoicing. Why? Well, one of the most popular D&D computer games of all time is back in a brand-new **enhanced edition** for PC, Mac, Linux, iOS, and Android. The original *Planescape: Torment* wasn't the first D&D computer game—nor indeed was it even a conventional fantasy adventure. But for many people, it remains one of the best and most innovative computerized versions of the world's most popular roleplaying game, thanks to the combination of a great setting, great design, and a unique alignment of people, place, and time.

The Early History of Computer RPGs

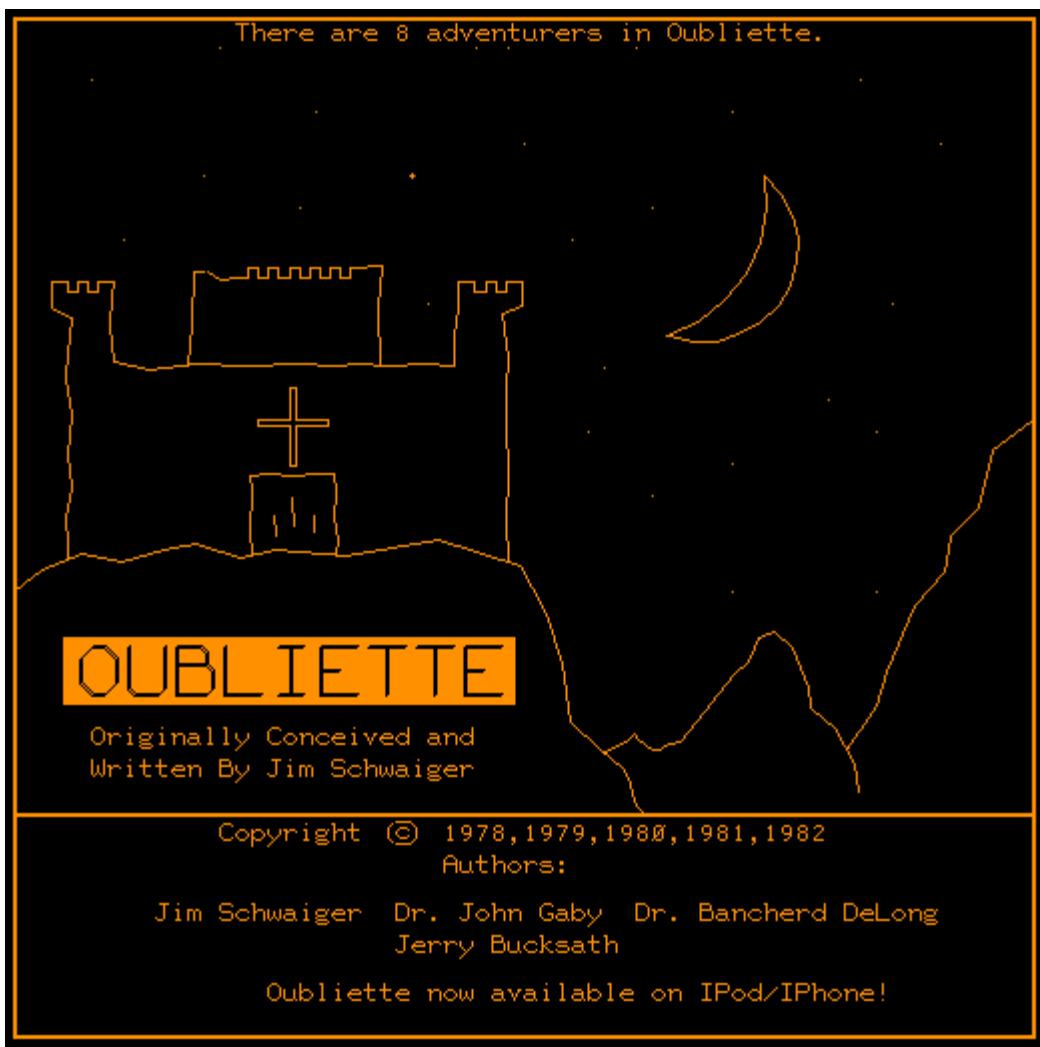
Computer roleplaying games (CRPGs) have been around almost as long as Dungeons & Dragons itself. Both pastimes were born at the

dawn of the computer age—the 1970s—and evolved on college campuses.



Orthanc, 1975 (select to view)

As such, from their earliest days, computer games inspired by D&D began to appear on shared campus computers, under such names as pedit5 and dnd (both first seen in 1975), Oubliette, Moria, Orthanc, and Avatar. By the time of Avatar's appearance in 1979, the first affordable personal computers were being sold to the public, inspiring the appearance of the first commercial computer roleplaying games, including Akalabeth, Ultima, and Wizardry.



Oubliette, 1977 (select to view)

Though all these titles advanced the banner of computer roleplaying, and though some were clearly influenced by D&D, none of them were official D&D releases. D&D publisher TSR licensed some early cartridge games, but the company established a serious presence in the computer market only in 1988, when TSR partnered with SSI to produce Pool of Radiance. That game was a turn-based CRPG that mimicked the play of first edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons to a fault—even using its spell memorization system. Pool of Radiance was followed by a series of much-loved games that came to be known as the “gold box” series, released between 1988 and 1992. Those games were succeeded by the shorter-lived “black box” series, which moved over to 3D graphics and a first-person point of view.

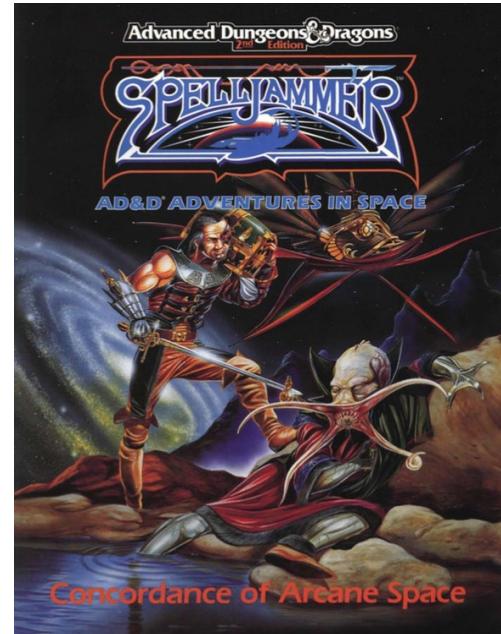


Pool of Radiance, 1988 (select to view)

The SSI era was an early high for the CRPG, but it didn't last. Dungeon Hack was the last black box game in 1993, after which the D&D computer releases moved to a number of different publishers. As result, the games became more haphazard and less influential—until BioWare published Baldur's Gate in 1998.

The Story of Planescape

TSR spent most of the 1990s creating and supporting new campaign settings. One of the most innovative of these was 1989's *Spelljammer*, billed as "AD&D Adventures in Space," and which predated the new decade by just a few months. It was innovative in part due to its science fantasy take on D&D, but also because it offered a way to connect together TSR's various campaign worlds. But after a few years of publication, the setting began to fade, with its last accessory (*The Astromundi*



Spelljammer (select to view)

Cluster box set) released in 1993.



David ‘Zeb’ Cook

However, TSR didn’t want to let the core idea go. They decided to create a new replacement setting that would also allow players to travel vast distances and visit numerous strange lands. This idea was soon paired up with a desire to revamp Jeff Grubb’s *Manual of the Planes* from 1987—D&D’s classic look at the Great Wheel cosmology. The new setting would be designed to allow players to travel across the planes to various worlds—and would quickly become one of D&D’s most evocative and unique products.

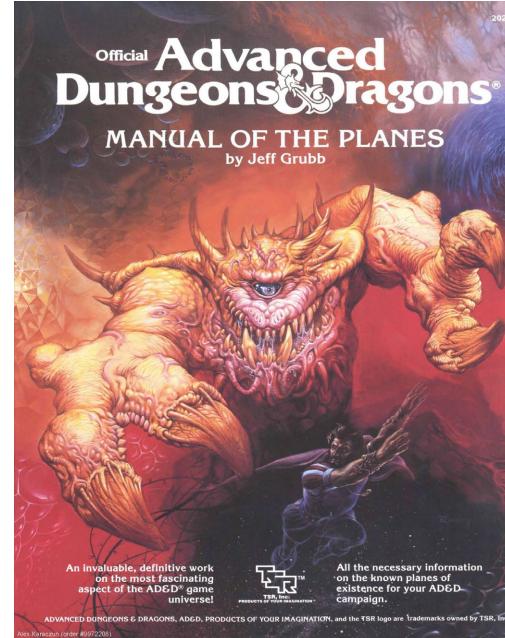
David “Zeb” Cook was the original designer behind Planescape, a setting that used as its starting point something that *Spelljammer* lacked: a central locale that defined the setting and brought it together. Sigil, City of Doors, sat at the center of the multiverse, filled with conspiracies and secrets. The setting would come to be populated by strange and memorable characters, including the iconic Lady of Pain, and equally weird organizations. Planescape’s designers even established a slang language for Sigil—the Cant—and the result was a gritty, shadowy world unlike anything else in the D&D catalog.

Planescape wasn’t defined only by its words, but also by its pictures. Conceptual artist Dana Knutson drew the first illustrations of the Lady of Pain, and many of the symbols for Sigil’s fifteen factions were his creations. Tony DiTerlizzi is one of the best-known artists for the setting, with his moody, dark, yet realistic

illustrations perfectly matching Cook's vision of the world.

Planescape debuted in the *Planescape Campaign Setting* in 1994. It was well received, and established a successful product line that would cover thirty books and box sets published over the next four-and-a-half years. These releases further defined Sigil, revealed the secrets of the Great Wheel, detailed the monstrous denizens of the planes, and laid out adventures across the multiverse.

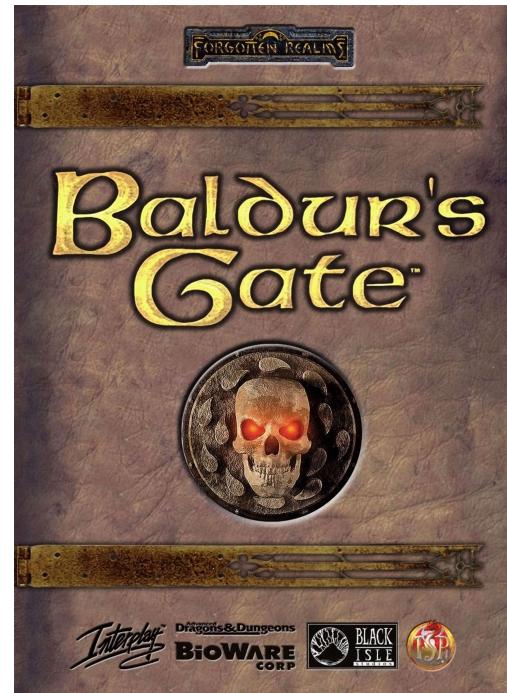
However, it was only after the Planescape RPG line ended in late 1998 that the setting would find even greater success in the computer game world—which brings us neatly back to Baldur's Gate.



Manual of the Planes, 1987 (select to view)

A Baldur's Gate Interlude

When BioWare produced the Baldur's Gate computer game in 1998, they debuted the new Infinity Engine—and a new way to look at D&D computer gaming. The Infinity Engine game system was closely based on the AD&D rules, but with one big change: its combat was real-time, in keeping with the evolving trends of the CRPG industry. The Infinity Engine probably also benefited



Baldur's Gate, 1988 (select to view)

from using the second edition AD&D rules as its foundation, since that ruleset was more polished and consistent than the first edition rules that had been the basis of SSI's gold-box games.



Baldur's Gate (select to view)



But where Baldur's Gate really excelled was in its computer game design. It offered a much more open sandbox than the older D&D games of the 1980s. It also presented more vivid nonplayer characters, brought alive in part by dialogue trees that gave players of the game the ability to interact with NPCs in meaningful ways. Baldur's Gate was also fundamentally about a story. It felt like an actual piece of fiction, with chapters that were added over time, and where the game's characters are the protagonists.

Baldur's Gate was a huge success, and was followed up by Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast in 1999, then the sequel Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn a year later. However, the Baldur's Gate games were also a stepping-stone for another computer game—one that wouldn't generate as many sales as Baldur's Gate, but which was destined to receive much more acclaim.

The Appearance of Planescape: Torment

Though Baldur's Gate was developed by Canadian video game developer BioWare, it was published by Interplay Entertainment. Even as BioWare continued to create D&D games, Interplay decided to make use of the Infinity Engine themselves by way of their Black

Isle Studio roleplaying division. The first result of those plans was a new game release in late 1999 called Planescape: Torment, directed by lead designer Chris Avellone and produced by Guido Henkel and Kenneth Lee.

Planescape: Torment combined the best features of the Infinity Engine with a story set in one of D&D's most evocative worlds. That story is very much the tale of its protagonist, the Nameless One, who starts the game on a mortuary slab. Having just died, the Nameless One drives the game through his need to discover who he is and why he's returned from death.

Like Baldur's Gate, the plot of Planescape: Torment reads like a novel, but the Nameless One isn't the only character in the story. Morte is a levitating skull who accompanies the Nameless One, and who bites people who annoy him. Annah-of-the-Shadows is an invective-flinging tiefling. Ignus is a pyromaniac mage. These and many other NPCs who can join the Nameless One's party are fully fleshed-out, well-realized characters. They don't just blindly follow the Nameless One, as an NPC party might in a classic CRPG. Instead, the secondary characters have their own motivations that might lead them into conflict with the Nameless One or each other. Beyond that, the whole world is made up of characters, some of whom might help the Nameless One and some of whom might hinder him. Still, the game's designers made sure that NPCs didn't simply break down along a simple axis of "helpful or antagonistic." All the game's characters are complex individuals.



Planescape: Torment (select to view)

One of the amazing things about Planescape: Torment is that interactions with the game's many characters rarely need to descend into conflict. Instead, many potential conflicts can be settled by way of the rich dialogue trees that debuted in Baldur's Gate. The number of times that actual combat is required in the game are minimal—though players who prefer a combat-based approach to gaming are free to simply wade right in.

This doesn't mean that the conflicts and disagreements of Planescape: Torment are easy or simple, however. The Cant-filled dialogue trees can demand choices that are gut wrenching, thanks to the game's devilish design. The team specifically wanted to create hard choices requiring thought, and which came with serious consequences. As such, they designed problems without right or wrong answers, or with multiple ways of approaching right and wrong and no clean resolution. Many have said that the result of this design approach was the first truly adult computer roleplaying game.

The entire game takes place in the Planescape setting, beginning in the city of Sigil. Torment takes full advantage of Sigil's dark, industrial streets, making them almost a character in their own right.

This spiky, jagged world—reflecting its spiky, jagged characters and its spiky, jagged plots—sets the stage for understanding that Planescape: Torment isn't the traditional high-fantasy adventure found in most CRPGs. Instead, the design team called it “avant-garde fantasy.” It was new and experimental, on the cutting edge of game design. When Planescape: Torment was released on December 12, 1999, it was quite simply unlike anything the computer gaming industry had ever seen.

The Rest of the Story

Planescape: Torment was critically well received. It won Game of the Year from the Vault Network, RPG of the Year from Computer Gaming World and GameSpot, and Game of the Month from PC Gamer US. In later years, Torment has consistently appeared on lists of the top games of all time.

Many influential RPG designers say that Planescape: Torment is the game that got them interested in the industry, and the CRPGs that have been the most clearly influenced by Torment are some of the biggest and most successful. Dragon Age features memorable characters and problems with a variety of solutions, while the Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim creates an immersive world akin to Torment's. And more recently, Torment: Tides of Numenera (released earlier this year) wears the original Torment's inspiration on its eponymous sleeve.

Original director Chris Avellone has continued to work on dozens of computer games since Planescape: Torment. The Icewind Dale series continued Interplay's D&D-based games through 2002, but with somewhat more traditional game play. Neverwinter Nights 2 offered more story-focused D&D play in 2006, using the Electron Engine that was a successor to the Infinity Engine. Produced through Obsidian Entertainment, a company made up of ex-Black Isle employees, that game also allowed players to create adventures of their own.



Icewind Dale (select to view)

More recently, Canadian video game developer **Beamdog** has been remaking the old Infinity Engine games. From 2012 to 2014, the success of Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition, Baldur's Gate II: Enhanced Edition, and Icewind Dale: Enhanced Edition has demonstrated that the modern market has a continued interest in these innovative games. In fact, the enhanced editions have been so successful that Beamdog created a new expansion—Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear, released last year.

And now Planescape: Torment—the most innovative game of them all—has returned with an enhanced edition for PC, Mac, Linux, iOS, and Android. You can read how Beamdog set about remaking this classic RPG for the modern age in our **interview** with producer Phillip Daigle. Countless players of the original game have had their prayers to the deities of the multiverse finally answered, and the doors of Sigil have been opened once again.

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YOUR CHANCE TO
WIN!



If you'd like a chance to win a copy of *Planescape: Torment: Enhanced Edition* for PC for yourself, simply take part in this issue's reader survey, where we have 25 PC codes to give away.

[TAKE SURVEY](#)

DRAGON+

The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

Get ready for intrigue as we plunge into the City of Splendors and encounter Trouble in Waterdeep



The **Dungeon Masters Guild** is the perfect platform for creating, sharing, and publishing your adventures. Since its launch, hundreds of DMs, players, and fans have created new characters, monsters, spells, and locations, bringing a wealth of options and detail to the Forgotten Realms. But with so many choices, how do you know which ones to pick? Well, *Dragon+* is here to help. Each issue, we shine a spotlight on some of the best content on the DMs Guild, and speak to its creators to learn how it was made.

This issue, we delve into *Trouble in Waterdeep*, an urban adventure from Arcana Games created by Eugene Fasano and James Hutt, which mixes dungeon crawling action, some fine roleplaying, and

plenty of political intrigue. It's very firmly aimed at beginner adventurers of 1st to 3rd level, and is divided into three two-hour chapters, making it a perfect introduction to the City of Splendors.

Best of all, *Trouble in Waterdeep* is available as an exclusive free download for *Dragon+* readers, which you can make use anytime while the current issue is live. But before you rush off to claim your free adventure, enjoy our chat with creator Eugene Fasano and learn more about the making of *Trouble in Waterdeep*, his thoughts on design and character creation, and some practical hints for creating your own DMs Guild adventures.

Tell us a bit about your history with D&D: How did you first get into playing the game?

James and I both grew up playing D&D. We started our respective journeys back in third edition and soon came to realize that we liked to DM and make our own adventures. Now we're both published game designers who still love to play D&D, and have joined forces to create professional quality content for the Dungeon Masters Guild.



What kind of DMs are you? What kind of sessions do you like to run?

James and I are very different Dungeon Masters. I prefer serious, immersive, and atmospheric play while he prefers more lighthearted

comedic games. We both recently ran *Curse of Strahd* for our independent groups. I ran it as a dark tale of gothic horror, while James ran it as a humorous tongue-in-cheek romp.

We both enjoy character-driven sessions, supported by a strong setting and featuring a balanced mix of combat, exploration, and social interaction. Though we have different styles, we both like immersive play. While we both like miniatures, our sessions and the adventures we make are more focused on theater of the mind.

What was the inspiration for *Trouble in Waterdeep*? How did the idea for the adventure first come to life?

When we sat down to design *Trouble in Waterdeep*, we started with broad concepts. We both knew we wanted to make an introductory adventure for several reasons. From our use of the Dungeon Masters Guild, it became apparent that adventures are the type of content the community desires. We decided to make it an introductory adventure so it would be accessible to the majority of players. It really came to life when we began to map out the Blackwood family tree and the web of intrigue that tied everything together. It felt authentic both to the style of adventure we wanted to create and the city of Waterdeep itself.

What attracted you to Waterdeep? Why did you choose the City of Splendors as a setting?

We knew from the start that we wanted to do an urban adventure. There's a lot of potential in the big cities of the Forgotten Realms that has gone unexplored in fifth edition. We picked Waterdeep in particular because of its iconic status in the setting. We wanted to really ground the adventure in the lore of the world so it could serve as a gateway into a campaign set in Waterdeep or the greater Forgotten Realms. The City of Splendors also allows us to marry theme and setting. Not only is the adventure urban, but it is also driven by intrigue. Waterdeep's strong political flavor and backdrop of masked lords and competing noble houses really helped set the right tone for our adventure.

TROUBLE IN WATERDEEP

Trouble in Waterdeep is part one of a three-part series of introductory adventures designed for three characters levels 1 to 3. Each adventure takes place in Waterdeep, which can be easily converted as a module for any rural or urban location. They can be run individually or in sequence as a connected story.

Trouble in Waterdeep centers on the actions of a single character, a new arrival in the Copper District of Waterdeep's Southern Ward. By the end of the first chapter they will have figured out that this plague is no act of nature, but is part of a larger plot. By the end of the second chapter, they will have discovered that their enemy is none other than Blackwood. By the end of the third and final chapter, they will have unmasked their adversary as Bran Blackwood and put a stop to his deadly plot.

Bran Blackwood is the bastard son of the wretched King of Waterdeep, who he despised. He believes he should succeed his mother in ruling the House. To aid him in this cause, he is seeking a powerful amulet owned by one of his ancestors. Thought to be no more than a family legend, this amulet has the power to make those who wear it invincible.

He has discovered that the amulet is buried somewhere beneath the Copper District and has begun several excavations to unearth it. He caused the plague by having his loyal servants

A.5. FOLK OF THE QUARTER
As the characters continue to wander the streets, they will come across an upset family pleading with a pair of Blackwood enforcers. The Blackwood enforcers are standing at a makeshift barricade blocking the street, made from stacked barrels and debris.

The family, a mother, father, and young daughter are begging to be let through. They are carrying bread from the bread cart; in his pleading, the father mentions that they have a sick son on whom the plague has taken hold.

The enforcers say that they will let the family nor the characters through. They claim that if they go in they will surely die, as this quarter is rampant with the plague; this quarter of the district is under maximum quarantine. They are under direct orders from Lord Bran Blackwood.

BLACKWOOD ENFORCER
Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class	15 (chain shirt, shield)
HP	25 (6d8 + 8)
Speed	35 ft.
STR	15 (+2)
DEX	11 (+0)
CON	14 (+2)
INT	10 (+0)
WIS	12 (+1)
CHA	10 (+0)

Genesys passive Perception 11
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Mace, Mere Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Shield Bash: Mere Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or Large creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

A.6. THE GRAINERY
If the characters decide to investigate the maximum quarantined area, this event will occur there. If they do not, they will encounter it elsewhere; a half-orc gang hired by Bran Blackwood is poisoning the relief bread his family is distributing.

As night begins to fall over the tiled roofs of the Copper District, you notice a group out of place among the thinning masses of poor and afflicted denizens. Three large figures shrouded in black cloaks disappear into an alleyway between two leaching buildings, each carrying a large cask under one burly arm.

These three figures are a group of half-orc mercenaries intent on poisoning the grain stores in the adjacent warehouse. The characters turn the corner just in time to see the figures slipping through the shadows of the grainary warehouse, piled high with mountains of grain. The sacks in side bear the Blackwood family crest.

The orc's casks contain visibly contaminated grain, poisoned with the Copper Plague. Characters that defeat Krusk and his orcs advance to the 2nd level.

(Select to view)

Trouble in Waterdeep mixes investigation, a dungeon crawl, and some good opportunities for roleplaying. Do you always try to achieve that kind of balance in your adventures?

Yes, the balance was very much intentional. We strive for a complete mix of exploration, social interaction, and exciting combat. We consciously try to include something for all types of players. As an introductory adventure, this is doubly important, as *Trouble in Waterdeep* could be a player's first D&D experience, and we want them to see the depth roleplaying games can offer. We prefer adventures that focus on the players and the world, utilizing combat as a dramatic device to advance the story of the game. We both prefer immersive settings that engage the players and prompt exploration.

Your characters and monsters, like the Wooden Man, are really interesting. What kind of tips do you have for creating memorable NPCs and monsters for a game?

One of our primary goals from the outset was to have every encounter be unique, and it wasn't long before we committed to customizing each monster. All the encounters are designed specifically for their location in the city and their place in the narrative. Most importantly, we wanted them to be fun. Our biggest tip for creating memorable NPCs and monsters is to make them fun to interact with. Monsters should represent fun challenges for the players to overcome, and fun tools for the DM to use.

A good trick for creating memorable encounters, even when using generic monsters, is to put them in environments the players wouldn't normally expect, like harpies nesting in the spire of a crumbling cathedral. Employing underused monsters can also keep experienced players on their toes. At low levels, many beasts are overlooked in favor of more mythical monsters, but animals can make for exciting introductory encounters; James is particularly fond of the giant goat, the giant toad, and the giant octopus.

In making memorable NPCs, giving them real motivations helps bring them to life. Both friendly NPCs such as quest givers, and adversarial NPCs such as monsters or major villains can be made solid through their desires and actions towards those desires.

Small details can also help to animate even otherwise inconsequential characters. Perhaps the first time the players encounter the town blacksmith, he is forging horseshoes. When they come back the next day, he is sweeping the shop. Later in the campaign, when war is raging in the kingdom, he is forging swords, making both him and the world feel more alive.

Do you have a guiding principle or design philosophy when it comes to making adventures?

Our guiding principle for this adventure was a commitment to creating a streamlined experience. We wanted to create a product that worked for the DM. *Trouble in Waterdeep* is filled with monster stat blocks and read-aloud text. Like the *Lost Mine of Phandelver*, it does not require the *Monster Manual* to run. There is no cross-referencing and, if needed, a DM can go in cold, taking it page by page. This makes it ideal for DMs and players who want to focus purely on roleplaying.

How have you found the DMs Guild as a platform for publishing your adventures?

I've been using the DMs Guild since it came out, and James and I have been working together on it for over a year. It is undeniably the best tool for reaching large numbers of players who are excited about new D&D content.

The features of the DMs Guild are powerful when you figure out how to use them. One tool that would prove useful to me as a creator is an

organizational tool for my various products. I would like a way to organize my titles by type; an adventure section, magic item section, battlemap section, character option section, and things like that.

What advice would you offer DMs and creators designing for the DMs Guild?

My advice is to present a finished product. You don't need professional experience to create a polished piece. Proofreading, stock art, and conscious layout design can really make a work stand out. A second piece of advice is to try and create something that hasn't been done before. Players and DMs are searching through the DMs Guild to find exciting and original new content. Explore themes, settings, or styles that interest you and then make an effort to present them in a new and unique way.

Tell us about Arcana Games, and your plans for the publishing house.
I'm publishing my own RPG content under Arcana Games. It's called *Blood and Bone*, a much grittier and darker game than D&D. James has his own company where he is working on an abstract strategy game, called Triangul8.

Tell us more about your other D&D adventures and products—what would you recommend for readers of Dragon+?

Last year we made a compendium of fifty magic items, *Visions of the Vault*, which gives you a breakdown of plenty of different magic items for use in your campaign or as one-off treasures. It includes things like *dead man's hands*, which are gloves made from the bones of a pickpocket's hand and which allow you to reroll Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks, or the *ring of rot*, which allows you to resist necrotic damage and spread disease. It was pretty popular, and we ended up making five volumes. I'm also particularly proud of *Gene's Guide to Thieves' Cant*, a player reference for roleplaying rogues. It's relayed in the voice of Gene, a rogue who



(Select to view)

claims to have stolen the gold of a sleeping dragon, won the beard off a dwarf in a game of dice, and sold a vistani his own elixirs back!

What's next on the horizon for Arcana Games? What new adventures can we look forward to?

Our newest title is *North of Neverwinter*, an introductory adventure where players explore the wilderness around Neverwinter and unravel ancient mysteries of the uncharted Spine of the World. James and I are having a lot of fun creating adventures for the Dungeon Masters Guild, and we are looking forward to creating all sorts of exciting content in the future.

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Tales from Cryptic Developers

The developers at Cryptic Studios present their own tales of fate...and failed rolls.

Trouble is stirring. Rumors of magic and uprisings fill the taverns. And now Lord Neverember is calling upon adventurers to help reclaim the old River District. This month, Neverwinter's latest expansion—The Cloaked Ascendancy—went live for both PS4 and Xbox One. It's time to pull your boots back on and see what's happening to your city!

Before you venture off into Neverwinter's River District or Spellplague Caverns, let's first touch base with the game's developers. Taking a cue from *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, we asked for their own tales from around the table. Their stories turned out to be less about the grandiose and more about the epic fail!

My least lucky dice roll in 16 years of playing D&D happened to one of my favorite characters: Milo Rapscalion, a fourth edition drow

multiclassed rogue/bard. He was the charming rogue with a heart of gold, and everyone else in the party had dumped Charisma. I had just taken my first level of bard and was excited to use my newfound skills to charm the crowd at a local tavern. I got onstage, and my DM said, “OK, roll to see how well you play.” I rolled a one. . .

“Ha,” I cried. “That’s OK, I get one reroll a day, so I’ll use it now!” I was not going to let my first performance be a disaster. I was Milo Rapscalion, dammit! I picked up my useless d20 and rolled again.

Another 1.

The crowd booed me offstage. Milo trudged, dejected, back up to his room. “Well, fine,” I huffed, tossing my stupid die on the table. “I’ll just play on my balcony, where no one else can hear.” The die came up 1 again. The table erupted in laughter as I cursed my luck and put my dice in the freezer.

My DM, being a kind, thoughtful person, said that Milo composed a new song on the balcony and played it for the pigeons. She started playing “Everybody Hurts” by R.E.M. on her phone, which she still has as her ringtone for me.

— *Patrick Poage, two years at Cryptic Studios, staff environment artist*



Gyrion transformed (select to view)

One of my first D&D adventures was actually using the Chainmail rules, and was run by Alan Lucien, my godfather. Cut to the chase—I'm new at the game, riding away on a (maybe) stolen horse that happens to be painted. As we're riding quickly out of town, there's a big something circling overhead. As the newb, I keep asking questions to see if I can identify it.

“Can I tell by its outline?” (Failed roll.)

“Can I tell how big it is?” (Failed roll.)

“What color is it?” (Roll a 1)

At this point, the DM tells me it’s getting bigger—fast. That is, it’s diving on me, as I’m the one in the party that slowed down to look at it. Making one last roll before contact, I barely managed to dive off of my horse, which is crushed under the weight and talons of a griffon! I didn’t look back, just kept running toward the party—and had to walk the rest of the way as no one would give me a ride.

To this day, I still get the “Yeah, but what color is it?” ribbing!

— *Thomas Foss, fourteen years at Cryptic Studios, lead designer (and still respectful of gryphons)*



Kabal (select to view)

Ok, so my party and I were boarding a pirate ship, stealthily, by water. Of course, it's pretty difficult to get aboard a ship without a ladder, but some of us were able to manage it.

The rest of my party climbed on board with one or two checks, but I failed both times, and then failed some more, splashing back into the water with every botched roll. Cries arose from the deck as the rest of my cohorts cut down the unsuspecting pirates, and meanwhile I was splashing about the hull of the ship in a frustrated frenzy.

Finally, one of my party members took pity on me and dropped the anchor—thankfully, not on my head—and I was able to climb up after a couple more rounds. . . after we'd fully taken the ship.

I never lived that down. Even after I pumped my climbing skill and got some spectacular vertical successes later in the campaign, I was still the rogue who couldn't climb.

—Vincent Malley, eight years at Cryptic Studios, producer



Nostura (select to view)

Most of my experience is from second edition AD&D.

My dice are always nice to me. Once I asked a DM if I could pick my stats, and he got upset and demanded that I roll my stats in front of

him so he would know I wasn't cheating. I got three 18s and nothing less than a 15.

The most entertaining moment of failure was simply a very bad decision. We had a thief who loved his *ring of feather falling*. Once, he was convinced to lend the ring to our cleric. A couple of gaming sessions later, the DM tells us we come to the top of a 500-foot cliff. The thief says, "I jump off. Wait! Did you give me back my ring. . ."

Our mage tried to cast *Tenser's floating disk* to catch him, but couldn't complete the spell before he was out of range. Fortunately, the thief had *stoneskin* on at a high enough level to protect against eight attacks. He took seven attacks from branches and the ground, and smashed most of his potions, but he lived.

The most entertaining moment due to die rolls was not exactly a failure or a success. Kevlar Pinwheel was a wild mage/cleric of Azuth, god of magic. We had just finished clearing out some monsters for a temple to Jezanna, the goddess of the moon, wine, and healing. The priests of the temple cast healing spells on us, but ran out before we were fully healed. Kevlar decided to cast *cure light wounds*, the first cleric spell he cast in the game, and rolled a wild surge. The wild surge read "Spell manifests as an elemental whose touch is the effect of the spell and whose lifespan is the duration of the spell." In second edition, *cure light wounds* is permanent. So the DM ruled that Kevlar's spell took the shape of Jezanna, who went around healing everyone before retiring to live in the temple. Kevlar proceeded to have a crisis of faith. When he called on his god, the wrong deity answered.

Ah, I remember another one, from very early levels!

Our toughest fighter dropped to -1 HP. We had no clerics and no one was trained in healing. The DM let us make first aid checks anyway, with a penalty. All four party members who tried rolled critical failures, doing more damage to the fighter. His player says, "Stay away; you're going to kill me!" Someone asks how we can be causing damage when trying to heal. Our thief says, "Well, obviously the problem is that he's got all this blood coming out of him. We're just trying to push it back in. That will fix him, right?"

— Lazar Steiner, two years at Cryptic Studios, staff software

engineer

To find out more about Neverwinter and The Cloaked Ascendancy,
head to playneverwinter.com.

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NEVERWINTER

THE CLOAKED ASCENDANCY



PLAY NOW

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS



D&D Beyond

Tools for fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons
embrace the digital realm.

The pen and paper nature of D&D is one of its longest held and most sacred traditions. Players have loved handling revered tomes like the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the *Player's Handbook* and the *Monster Manual*, and filling in their carefully compiled character sheets. But as the digital revolution has transformed so many other parts of life, a proper D&D digital companion has also remained a dearly held desire.

That was certainly the case for Adam Bradford, senior product

manager at Curse Media and a long-time D&D fan. “I knew the community had wanted a high-quality official digital toolset since the advent of fifth edition, and Curse’s expertise could make it happen,” he says, even as he confesses to some rather stealthy rogue-like tactics to bring his colleagues on board. “I started a D&D campaign in our office last July, knowing that exposing people to the game would make the case. After a couple of sessions, everyone was hooked. Dungeons & Dragons took over our office, and that passion got this off the ground.”

The result was D&D Beyond, a D&D digital toolset announced for PC and tablet, and one which works across pretty much every mobile platform you can imagine. Bradford is certainly ambitious in his aim for D&D Beyond: “The goal is to be the canonical source for digital D&D,” he says, and he promises a wealth of features at launch. “Players will be able to use the game compendium and easy-to-browse listings for spells, magic items, and monsters, as well as a character builder and digital character sheet. You will also be able to create custom homebrew content that is integrated into the toolset.”



Adam Bradford

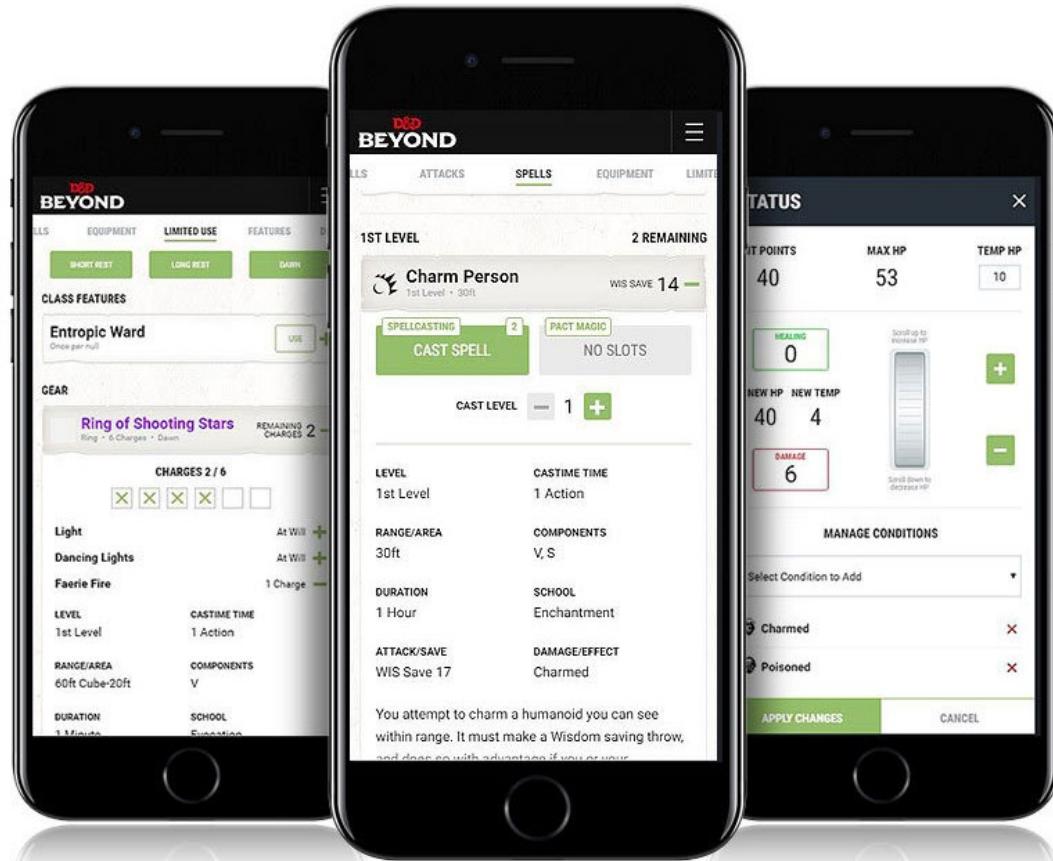
**INTRODUCING AN OFFICIAL FIFTH EDITION D&D
DIGITAL TOOLSET**

The screenshot shows the D&D Beyond website interface. At the top, there's a search bar and a navigation bar with icons for BOSSES, CHARACTERS, ITEMS, SPELLS (which is highlighted in purple), MONSTERS, RULES, ARTICLES, and FORUMS. Below the header, there's a banner for "Draizz Do'Urden" and a user profile for "Username4224". The main content area has tabs for "SPELLS" and "TABLETOP HERO". On the left, there's a sidebar showing character portraits for Dwarf, Elf, Halfling, Human, Gnome, and Half-Elf. The right side features a large table for "MY SPELLS" with columns for LEVEL, NAME, CASTING TIME, RANGE/AREA, DURATION, ATTACK/SAVE, DAMAGE/EFFECT, and UNLOCK. Spells listed include Absorb Elements (1st level), Acid Arrow (2nd level), Acid Splash (Cannibal), Aid (2nd level), and Alarm (1st level). On the far right, there's a mobile device displaying a character sheet with stats like Strength, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma.

(Select to view)

However, Bradford is conscious of the need to reassure traditional pen-and-paper players and DMs that D&D Beyond is not looking to change the essential nature of the game they know and love, but rather just wants to make it easier to play. “The aim is to enhance the experience at the table. We don’t want to affect the player interaction that makes Dungeons & Dragons so great. We want to support players and Dungeon Masters by saving them time.”

Through extensive testing, Bradford has found that D&D Beyond does indeed hold some distinct advantages over more traditional analog methods. “We have all wanted a way in fifth edition to find an obscure rule immediately instead of thumbing through an index. That way, the focus can be more on telling an epic fantasy story with friends and less on math, remembering what it means to be grappled, or finding all the stats for tiny furry critters when you cast *conjure woodland beings*.¹”



(Select to view)

Bradford even jokes that he might be developing too much of a reliance on D&D Beyond's convenience: "I've been using D&D Beyond in our office game for a few months. Last month, the site was down during one of our sessions in preparation for the start of beta. It was tough to play without it!"

D&D Beyond certainly sounds like it has something unique to offer both beginners and experienced players. Character creation is handled by a character builder with four modes: a beginner-friendly step-by-step process, an advanced method intended for veteran players, a quick build as modeled in the *Player's Handbook*, or completely random generation for a true roleplaying challenge. You choose race and class, determine your ability scores, describe your character and choose equipment, just as you would with a paper and pen. But D&D Beyond walks you through the process in a way that is helpful for new players while offering a streamlined path for experts.

Bradford cites the example of generating an energetic gnome prankster named Gamndell Banglebon to demonstrate how this works. "We start with level and jump right into choosing race and class—all with ample help text to make those choices. Anything that requires a decision or input will be called out clearly in the appropriate section and summarized in the pending actions area. The builder then walks us through determining ability scores, with options for manual entry, point buy, or standard array."

Once the playful gnome has started to come to life, you can flip to D&D Beyond's character sheet to see how he looks in person. "His portrait, name, level, and basic statistics are displayed as part of the header that stays on screen, and we can also manage his hit points and apply conditions," says Bradford. "The bottom sections include his ability scores, saves, skills, attacks, spells management, features, description, and equipment, as well as a notes section that can be used to jot down his latest prank ideas." You simply switch back and forth between the builder to edit Gamndell and the character sheet to play him. It becomes a distinct boon at the table, allowing you to view key information at a glance, as well as track resources and status, and manage spells and equipment.

D&D Beyond's comprehensive compendium feature also places a wealth of D&D lore at every player's fingertips, broken down into

three major sections: Rules, Cyclopedia, and Adventures. The Rules section collects all the game mechanics and content from sources like the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. The Cyclopedia includes things like the location writeups from *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide* and the monster exposition in *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. Any published campaigns and adventures you've bought are found in the Adventures section, which also includes core tables of spells, magic items, monsters, and NPCs.

"These listings will allow players to find any of these elements from any source in a single easily-searchable place," says Bradford.

"We've spent a great deal of time poring through every spell, item, and monster to parse metadata that can be filtered. If players want to see every spell that requires an Intelligence saving throw, every teleportation spell, or every spell that deals thunder damage, they can do that in the listings."

For Dungeon Masters, D&D Beyond also promises improved efficiency, not only dramatically cutting the time to set up a playing session, but making things run a lot more smoothly in game. In this way, DMs can concentrate on doing what they do best—driving the narrative and making it a fun experience. "I recently started a *Storm King's Thunder* campaign, and character creation during our 'Session Zero' took more than three hours," says Bradford. "With D&D Beyond, that time is cut dramatically. The listings have already saved me significant time. If my players find a *staff of the magi*, they have the information at hand and are already fighting over it, long before they can reach for the book from the stack."

Dungeon Masters will also be pleased to know that D&D Beyond will fully integrate with recent storylines like *Storm King's Thunder* and *Tales from the Yawning Portal*. These modules will appear in the Adventures section of the compendium, allowing players to view a campaign's full text, maps, and images digitally. Spells, magic items, monsters, and NPCs will also be seamlessly integrated into these core listings, and any player options will be available in the character builder.



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But what of D&D Beyond’s approach to homebrew content, a cherished part of many a playing group’s repertoire? “Homebrew content has been an important part of Dungeons & Dragons since the beginning, and we knew from day one it was a priority for D&D Beyond,” says Bradford. “Players will be able to create their own custom spells, magic items, monsters, and more for use in their games. They can also make that content public and share it with the community. Public homebrew content can be browsed and added to a player’s ‘Homebrew Collection,’ which is treated like any other source. We use that concept to ensure that only the homebrew you care about is integrated. Not everyone wants to see hundreds of player race write-ups for flumphs when building a character.”

Such a wealth of features and convenience naturally comes at a price, but Bradford is keen to let fans know that D&D Beyond has something for everyone. A number of different subscription options are available, including a free version. “Players who don’t subscribe can create and manage up to six characters, create private homebrew content, and view and use any of their unlocked content throughout

D&D Beyond—including any digital purchases of official material.”

“Players will also have flexibility when purchasing official digital content. You can buy the content at the sourcebook level for a discount, but some content will also be bundled in smaller packages, including down to individual elements. If you want to use the tabaxi race but don’t want to buy the entire *Volo’s Guide to Monsters*, you will be able to purchase the tabaxi by itself.”

For those seeking more depth, the Hero Tier subscription is aimed primarily at players, allowing them to manage unlimited characters and share and use public homebrew community content. The most fully featured Master Tier is reserved for dedicated DMs and allows them to gain twelve campaign character slots which they use to extend invites to free player accounts. “With a Master Tier subscription, players can use all of the DM’s unlocked content for their characters,” says Bradford. “So if the DM has unlocked *Volo’s Guide to Monsters*, any players with free accounts that are part of the DM’s campaign can create a tabaxi sorcerer that has a gazer familiar.”

Exact pricing details have yet to be announced, but D&D Beyond’s primary goal is to grant players flexibility and control of what they purchase and use. “Some players will be able to do everything they want to do without a subscription,” says Bradford, “while others will find value in one of the other two subscription tiers.”

Development on D&D Beyond continues apace, and despite the many challenges of producing a toolset of such scope and breadth—and making it work on variety of devices—Bradford cites the digital character sheet as perhaps his favorite part of the experience. “Even if you prefer to print out paper character sheets, it’s still great to be able to pull up your character on your phone during your lunch break and dream of future advancement, or familiarize yourself with some spells for the next session. Over time, D&D Beyond has evolved into something that I believe will be really valuable to the community.”

Yet perhaps the most important factor in making D&D Beyond a success is the input of D&D fans who have already begun to shape the program by providing feedback on its most important features. “The extensive playtesting that preceded fifth edition has been cited

many times as a major factor in its success,” says Bradford. “We want to take the same approach with D&D Beyond—the input of the actual players using the toolset is of utmost importance.”

Work on the D&D Beyond beta program has exceeded expectations, both in terms of the number of players taking part and in the quantity and quality of their responses. “It’s been exciting to be a part of the community that has sprung up so quickly around D&D Beyond,” says Bradford. “We have learned that we’re on the right track with most things, and we’re carefully reviewing new suggestions to see what we can incorporate into the toolset.” Bradford finishes by extending an open invitation to all players to visit the beta at www.dndbeyond.com and continue the evolution of D&D’s digital identity. “As with everything we’ll do,” says Bradford, “we will engage with the community. We’re excited to continue the adventure!”

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Unearthed Arcana: Feats for Skills

Each of these feats makes you better at one of the game's eighteen skills. We invite you to read them, and give them a try in play!

Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by design iterations or full game development and editing.

They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events. If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

This document introduces new feats to playtest. Each of these feats is

associated with a skill, as summarized below.

Skills	Feat
Acrobatics	Acrobat
Animal Handling	Animal Handler
Arcana	Arcanist
Athletics	Brawny
Deception	Silver-Tongued
History	Historian
Insight	Empathic
Intimidation	Menacing
Investigation	Investigator
Medicine	Medic
Nature	Naturalist
Perception	Perceptive
Performance	Performer
Persuasion	Diplomat
Religion	Theologian
Sleight of Hand	Quick-Fingered
Stealth	Stealthy
Survival	Survivalist

Acrobat

You become more nimble, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Acrobatics skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- As a bonus action, you can make a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If you succeed, difficult terrain doesn't cost you extra movement until the end of the current turn.

Animal Handler

You master the techniques needed to train and handle animals. You gain the following benefits.

- Increase your Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Animal Handling skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency

bonus to checks you make with it.

- You can use a bonus action on your turn to command one friendly beast within 60 feet of you that can hear you and that isn't currently following the command of someone else. You decide now what action the beast will take and where it will move during its next turn, or you issue a general command that lasts for 1 minute, such as to guard a particular area.

Arcanist

You study the arcane arts, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Arcana skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You learn the *prestidigitation* and *detect magic*. You can cast *detect magic* once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Brawny

You become stronger, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Strength score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Athletics skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You count as if you were one size larger for the purpose of determining your carrying capacity.

You can read the rest of this Unearthed Arcana PDF [here](#).

To see the full treasure trove of Unearthed Arcana articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, [visit the archive here](#).

Have a request for Unearthed Arcana? Follow [@mikemearls](#) on Twitter and let him know.

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Unearthed Arcana: Feats for Skills

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- You count as if you were one size larger for the purpose of determining your carrying capacity.

Diplomat

You master the arts of diplomacy, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Persuasion skill. If you are already proficient in this skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- If you spend 1 minute talking to someone who can understand what you say, you can make a Charisma (Persuasion) check contested by the creature's Wisdom (Insight) check. If you or your companions are fighting the creature, your check automatically fails. If your check succeeds, the target is charmed by you as long as it remains within 60 feet of you and for 1 minute thereafter.

Empathic

You possess keen insight into how other people think and feel. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Insight skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You can use your action to try to get uncanny insight about one humanoid you can see within 30 feet of you. Make a Wisdom (Insight) check contested by the target's Charisma (Deception) check. If your check succeeds, you have advantage on attack rolls and ability checks against the target until the end of your next turn.

Historian

Your study of history rewards you with the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the History skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- When you take the Help action to aid another creature's ability check, you can make a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check. On a success, that

creature's check gains a bonus equal to your proficiency bonus, as you share pertinent advice and historical examples. To receive this bonus, the creature must be able to understand what you're saying.

Investigator

You have an eye for detail and can pick out the smallest clues. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Investigation skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You can take the Search action as a bonus action.

Medic

You master the physician's arts, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Medicine skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- During a short rest, you can clean and bind the wounds of up to six willing beasts and humanoids. Make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check for each creature. On a success, if a creature spends a Hit Die during this rest, that creature can forgo the roll and instead regain the maximum number of hit points the die can restore. A creature can do so only once per rest, regardless of how many Hit Dice it spends.

Menacing

You become fearsome to others, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Intimidation skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- When you take the Attack action on your turn, you can replace one attack with an attempt to

demoralize one humanoid you can see within 30 feet of you that can see and hear you. Make a Charisma (Intimidation) check contested by the target's Wisdom (Insight) check. If your check succeeds, the target is frightened until the end of your next turn. If your check fails, the target can't be frightened by you in this way for 1 hour.

Naturalist

Your extensive study of nature rewards you with the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Nature skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You learn the *druidcraft* and *detect poison and disease* spells. You can cast *detect poison and disease* once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Perceptive

You hone your senses until they become razor sharp. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Perception skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- Being in a lightly obscured area doesn't impose disadvantage on your Wisdom (Perception) checks if you can both see and hear.

Performer

You master performance so that you can command any stage. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Performance skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.

- While performing, you can try to distract one humanoid you can see who can see and hear you. Make a Charisma (Performance) check contested by the humanoid's Wisdom (Insight) check. If your check succeeds, you grab the humanoid's attention enough that it makes Wisdom (Perception) and Intelligence (Investigation) checks with disadvantage until you stop performing.

Quick-Fingered

Your nimble fingers and agility let you perform sleight of hand. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Sleight of Hand skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- As a bonus action, you can make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to plant something on someone else, conceal an object on a creature, lift a purse, or take something from a pocket.

Silver-Tongued

You develop your conversational skill to better deceive others. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Deception skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- When you take the Attack action on your turn, you can replace one attack with an attempt to deceive one humanoid you can see within 30 feet of you that can see and hear you. Make a Charisma (Deception) check contested by the target's Wisdom (Insight) check. If your check succeeds, your movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from the target and your attack rolls against it have advantage; both benefits last until the end of your next turn or until you use this ability on a different target. If your check fails, the target can't be deceived by you in this way for 1 hour.

Stealthy

You know how best to hide. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Stealth skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- If you are hidden, you can move up to 10 feet in the open without revealing yourself if you end the move in a position where you're not clearly visible.

Survivalist

You master wilderness lore, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Survival skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You learn the *alarm* spell. You can cast it once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Theologian

Your extensive study of religion rewards you with the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Religion skill. If you are already proficient in the skill, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- You learn the *thaumaturgy* and *detect evil and good* spells. You can cast *detect evil and good* once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.



The Virtual Reality Gambit

Drow priestesses as pawns, mind flayers as bishops: D&D meets virtual reality in Dungeon Chess.

This is the year that virtual reality truly arrives. That's what Geoffrey Zatkin, cofounder of VR studio Experiment 7 and creative director of the new D&D-themed **Dungeon Chess** game, firmly believes. "I won't lie," he says, "2017 is the beginning of something awesome."

Virtual reality is everywhere these days, with the Oculus Rift, Samsung Gear VR, HTC Vive, and PlayStation VR now firmly established and competing for gamers' attention. VR is even starting to have an impact on Dungeons & Dragons, with Altspace VR and now Experiment 7 both offering brand new ways to explore, expand, and interact with our favorite hobby.

"This is our first generation of consumer-grade VR, and we're in year one," says Zatkin. "Even as someone who's been here a few times, it's easy to forget how challenging these first couple of years can be." Still, he has no doubts about VR's innate appeal, nor about what its widespread adoption will ultimately mean—not just to dedicated gamers, but to people from all walks of life.

"For me, the killer app of VR is social presence," he says. "It's the

difference between talking to my wife on Skype versus talking to her across a coffee table. I've always enjoyed the communal aspect of games, and how they bring people together. For thousands of years, games have been played socially. Some of my best gaming memories involve the group improv nature of Dungeons & Dragons, watching an opponent's expressions in Magic: The Gathering, or shaking hands after a Warhammer 40k match."

With people engaging in increasingly busy lifestyles—making it tough enough to get local friends together to sit around a gaming table, never mind friends scattered across all parts of the globe—Zatkin says that virtual reality is set to become increasingly important. "I might never be able to get all my high school or college buddies back together under one roof for a game night. But with VR's sense of presence, combined with its capacity to bring games to life in new ways, I think we can create some amazing alternatives."

It's this kind of passion and enthusiasm that led Zatkin to form Experiment 7 with cofounder Demetri Detsaridis. They started out by recruiting a number of game industry veterans who had worked on titles such as EverQuest, Command & Conquer and even Grand Theft Auto V, then began to explore the possibilities of this exciting new technology. The company's memorable name derives from both the ongoing experimental nature of virtual reality and the fact that this is Zatkin and Detsaridis's seventh big project—their seventh experiment together.

One of the studio's first developments was a shared virtual gaming space that they dubbed the "Magic Table," which allows players to meet and interact as they would in normal life. "What we're making at Experiment 7 is a series of beautiful environments, where you can meet up with your friends from around the world," says Zatkin. "In the middle of each environment is a Magic Table that can spawn any number of games that are played on real tables. The overall concept is simple: Join your friends in beautiful virtual settings, select a game to play, watch the game materialize on the Magic Table, and play it together."



Mind Flayer (select to view)

There's been a notable resurgence in tabletop gaming in recent years, and combining that with a virtual environment might seem a natural progression. But according to Zatkin, Dungeon Chess wasn't quite conceived that way. "It's a happy accident, because playing tabletop games is something we never stopped doing," says Zatkin. "But our drive to make these games mirrors the current renaissance—it's the social aspect, the mental stimulation, the rediscovery of part of your childhood. Plus the fact that tabletop and board games are fun!"



Gold Dragon (select to view)

The Magic Table concept does seem exactly the kind of thing that virtual reality is made for. However, it's interesting to learn that the path that led Experiment 7 to develop a chess game was actually a

shared love of D&D. “It’s been an aspiration of mine since childhood to work on an official D&D anything,” says Zatkin. “This was true of most of us at Experiment 7, and it took us less than a coffee break to realize that we wanted to make Dungeon Chess—both for personal reasons and because it aligned with what we were already building.” After making that momentous decision, it became necessary to make the right connections. “Our producer Coray Seifert mentioned that he knew John Feil, who handles digital licensing for Dungeons & Dragons. So we hijacked one of Wizards of the Coast’s meetings at GDC [the annual Game Developer’s Conference] and pitched the game. And now, here we are.”

Although Dungeon Chess uses cutting-edge VR technology, its developers weren’t looking to reinvent the wheel with the game. Chess has a long and noble history going back more than a thousand years, with the modern form of the game having been played since the fifteenth century. Experiment 7’s stated goal for Dungeon Chess was straightforward: “Make a game that people who like chess will enjoy, be they ranked competitors or new players. We’re not looking to modify the game’s meaty core, but instead do a solid VR adaptation of it.”

Dungeon Chess will feature plenty of modes and features for chess lovers to enjoy. “We’ll have single player versus a variety of AI skill levels,” says Zatkin, “in addition to ranked matchmaking and ‘invite a friend’ modes. Plus, we’ll be adding blitz/lightning play soon.” Development won’t halt at release, though, and Zatkin says the game will continue to evolve. “Over time, as our community requests other features, we’ll look at what it takes to add those to the game as well.”

But what of the actual D&D component? What will make this chess game so special for D&D fans? “When a game starts, you take command of an army of chess pieces,” Zatkin says. “Each piece is a D&D creature, complete with its own animations and attitude. Instead of moving or attacking with your bishop, you get to move a mind flayer and watch it psionically blast an adversary into submission!” That’s certainly enough to whet any fan’s appetite, but Dungeon Chess will also touch on historical pop culture influences like the iconic set of the *Millennium Falcon*, books such as the Harry Potter series, and even older videogames like Battle Chess and Archon. As Zatkin says, “Animated fighting chess is pretty much a

universal fantasy.”

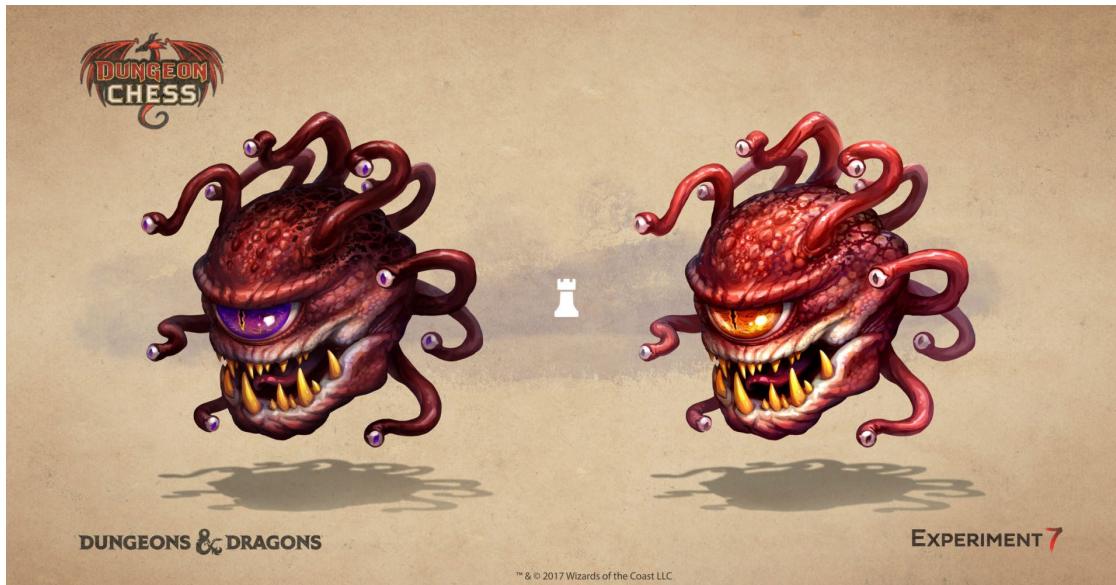
The more you talk to the team from Experiment 7, the more you realize that Dungeon Chess is a real labor of love for them. Producer Coray Seifert takes over to talk about how they created the iconic red (for evil alignment) and gold (for good alignment) chess sets. “The most challenging part of making Dungeon Chess has been the volume and the quality of the content we’re creating,” Seifert says. “But it’s been an absolute joy seeing that content go from words in the *Monster Manual* to concepts on a page, then becoming animated creatures in our game.”

Seifert has the concept art of a beholder as his desktop picture, and vows that he is never going to change it. “I just saw our gold dragon, which is based on the classic design from D&D artist Todd Lockwood. I had to show my kids, my wife, and the dog because I was so fired up. Each animation sends waves of excitement and childish glee through the office.”



Drow (select to view)

The level of detail the Experiment 7 team has gone to with Dungeon Chess is impressive, and Zatkin returns to give an insight into the process of creating just a single piece. “The pawn for our Red Set is a drow priestess, the iconic D&D race of dark elves, and a row of them should look appropriately menacing. Priestesses can use shields, lending visual symmetry to our lineup, and our drow also got a fighting skirt over her armor to mimic the silhouette of a pawn.



Beholder (select to view)

“Our red bishop is the D&D mind flayer. I love that you can see this bishop profile in the concept art, but that it still beautifully captures the distinct look and feel of an illithid. There are also some fun little touches. Since mind flayers can levitate at will, we decided to add a robe and a cape scarf, providing a flowing motion. Bishops need to be able to attack nearby opponents in addition to those all the way across the board—and the mind flayer’s Mind Blast power fills that requirement nicely.”

Even if it were just a standard videogame, Dungeon Chess might be enough to delight both chess players and D&D fans alike. But by adding the wow factor of VR, the game adds an extra dimension of immersion. However, it’s clear that Dungeon Chess, just like the emerging VR market, is just the beginning for Experiment 7. Zatkin says that he’s just as excited about VR’s non-gaming applications, and cites visiting virtual museums for travel and tourism, or sporting events and concerts viewed from the best seats in the house, as just some of its endlessly fascinating potential applications. “I’d love to virtually watch Neil deGrasse Tyson give a lecture at the Hayden Planetarium, or hear Neil Gaiman do an intimate reading in a small English pub.”

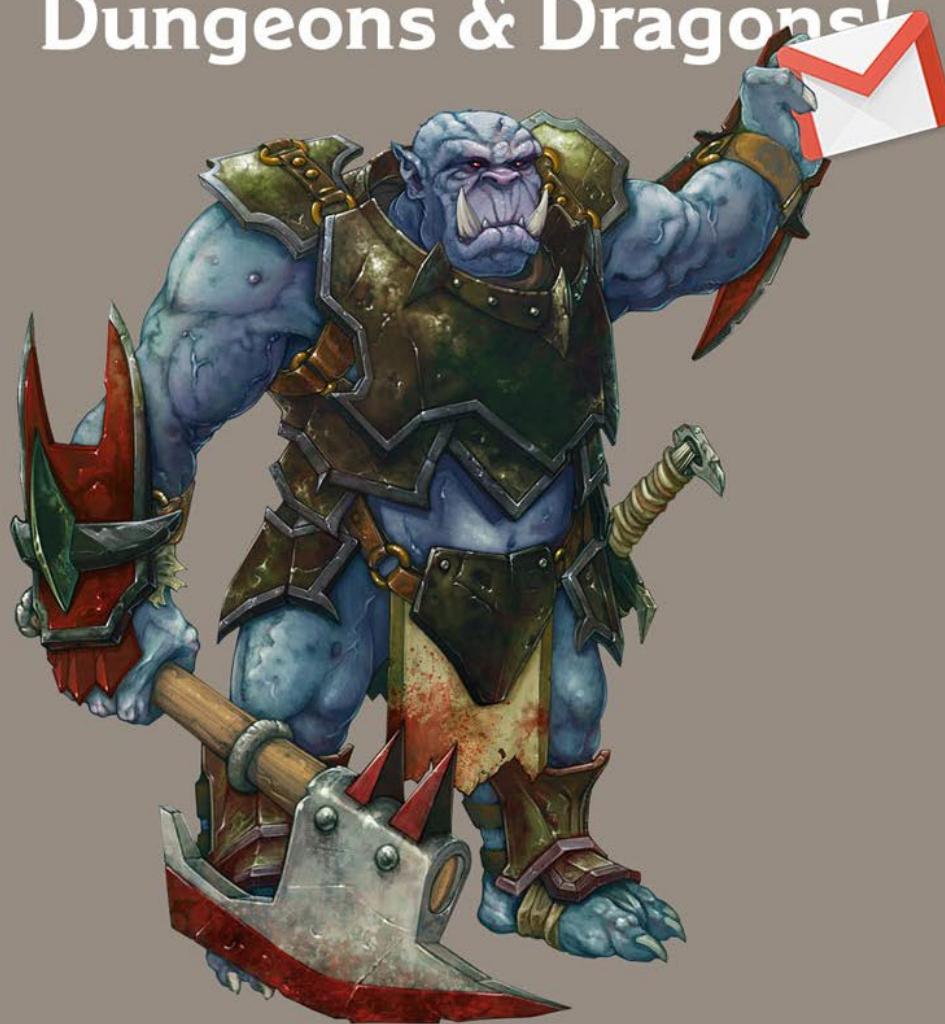
For the moment, however, Experiment 7 will be concentrating on what it does best. “We’re extremely focused on the core user experience and on providing great things for people to play,” says Zatkin. “I want to be able to play these and future games with my young nephews and nieces, and with their grandparents. We have

more projects on the horizon that will continue to impress, entertain, and delight our audience, and we look forward to talking about them soon!”

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Next Issue: Dragon+ 14

Prepare for a summer spectacular as Dragon+ roars towards issue 14.



The start of summer allows Dragon+ to spread its wings as we go on a globetrotting journey, looking at how people play Dungeons & Dragons across the planet in a “D&D Around the World” special.

We’ll also have a report from Gary Con with the legendary Luke Gygax on running the Tomb of Horrors tournament, and a feature on how to use virtual tabletops like Roll20 and Fantasy Grounds to enhance your Dungeon Master skills. Our next issue will also feature a free scenario called The Rat Queen’s Adventure, another painting tutorial to help you make the most of your minis, and another free adventure for you to download in the Best of the DMs Guild.

As well, expect another of our delves into the imposing Dragon archive, all our regulars like Unearthed Arcana, Maps of the Month, a selection of the best D&D video and audio highlights, and much more!

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